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ISSUE #106 SEP 2001

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WIN! **THE COMPO NO ONE FINDS** Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some PC goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: The Compo No One Finds (106), *PC ZONE*, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1P 5FF. The first entry with the correct answer plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. The editor's decision is final. Closing date: Wednesday August 22 2001. The winner of our July (issue 104) cover compo was Mark Fletcher from Wigan, who wins a lovely little something from the *ZONE* prize cupboard.

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PLAYING A WAITING GAME



Summer's been and almost gone, and, despite the hype, the season notable only for the lack of football on our screens has been as much of a disappointment as ever. The sun actually threatened to come out one weekend, while I was stuck in a sweaty basement office without air-conditioning. As expected, Tim Henman's still a nearly-man, although he's now adored by more elderly ladies than Tom Jones and Bruce Forsythe put together. The lucky man. And, more depressingly, there are still no huge games on the shelves for you to waste your money on.

Looking back it's been one of the quietest six months I can remember and I'm not really expecting things to hot up until the leaves start dropping off the trees. Round about then you should be able to get your hands on this month's cover game, *Aliens Vs Predator 2*. With a *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* (isn't 'done when it's done' getting arse-numbingly boring?) seemingly no nearer than this time last year, I predict the sequel to the scariest shooter ever is going to be this year's big hit. We're the only print magazine in the world that's been shown playable code, and it's looking superb. See for yourself with our massive preview, which starts on page 34. You can also look forward to our exclusive demo next month, and an exclusive review the month after that.

"*Max Payne* is so late it's going to be told to sit in the corner of our office for a couple of hours when it finally arrives"

But what of the big two in the shooter's world? We've been told to expect *Unreal 2* around this time next year, but the good news is that we'll be jetting off to the developers for an exclusive hands-on sometime before Christmas. id is famous for playing its cards close to its chest, and while the world knows *Doom 3* is in production, an email sent around from its PR company last week concerning an announcement of new games at the forthcoming QuakeCon has started the world talking. Unless it was a typo, id is going to be showing something else as well as the next chapter in the *Doom* universe. My money's on *Quake 4* (for reasons I can't go into), although I also expected Coventry to win last year's FA Cup and bet a substantial amount of money on Nasty Nick winning the first Big Brother contest. One thing is certain though, you won't be playing either of these titles until the end of next year at the earliest.

Which just leaves *Max Payne*. The game that's so late it's going to be told to sit in the corner of our office for a couple of hours when it finally arrives was supposed to be ready for review this month, but it has slipped again. After consulting with the authorities we've been told we're not going to get reviewable code until box copies arrive and the game's on the shelves, which should be round about the end of July. Is this a cause for concern? Usually, but from what I saw at E3, *Max Payne* is looking as fantastic as ever. Watch for our review next month and the forthcoming playable demo if you're not sure. Anyway, after four years, what's another month between friends?



Watch out, he spits.

Dave Woods
Editor



TOP STORY

Pull his legs off...

SPIDER-MAN

With great power, comes great responsibility

MAKING SPIDER-SENSE DAVE WOODS

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Livesay
PUBLISHER Activision
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE September 2001
WEBSITE www.activision.com

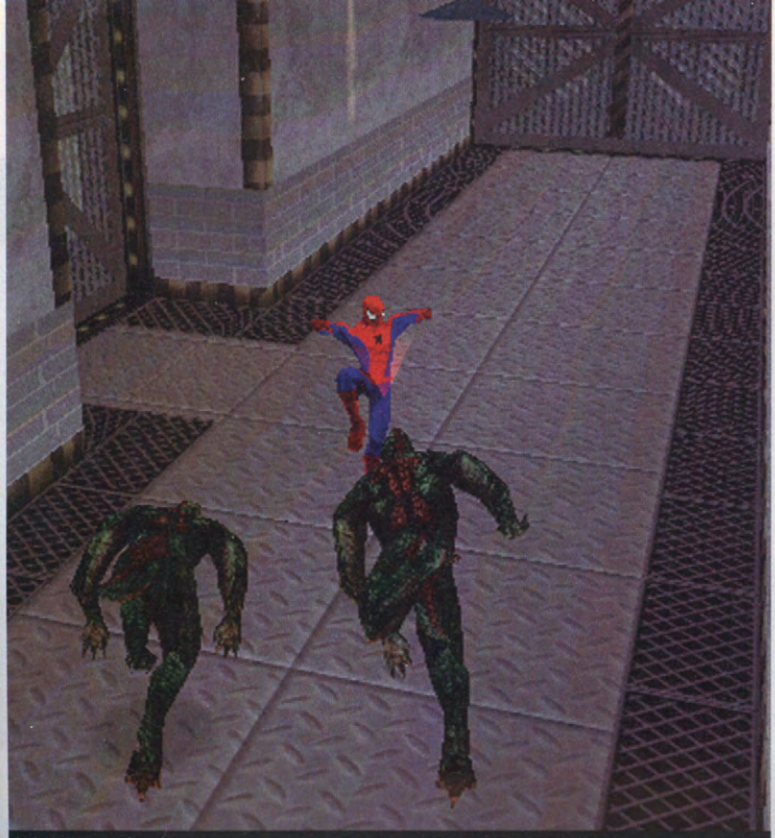
IN SUMMARY

Peter Parker gets bitten by a radioactive spider. Then he nearly gets knocked over by a car, but in jumping out of the way sticks to a wall and finds out he has arachnid capabilities. Shamelessly exploiting this, he stars in a number of comics, cartoons and films before turning up in his first PC game.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

It uses the *Tony Hawk's 2* engine, and if the conversion works as well as that did we could be looking at the best superhero game on the PC. It's not just a platformer either, expect a game that requires thought and quick reactions, along with a great storyline.





Is he strong...?



Listen bud.



He's got radioactive blood.



Sigh!

Console games; normally we wouldn't piss on them if they were on fire, but then a certain *Tony Hawk's* came along, flipped a few ollies, won our hearts and minds and helped us lose our front teeth. Take the engine from this super-fluid game, add the best superhero of all time, and you've got the recipe for a console conversion that could just prove that lightning does indeed strike twice.

Spider-Man made his debut in 1965, shortly after being bitten by a radioactive spider, which endowed him with super-strength, super-speed, the eerie Spider-Sense and the ability to walk up walls. It's even been rumoured that I used to possess a Spider-Man costume and once made a baby cry by walking up to the pram and sticking my masked-face in, but then every superhero has his off day.

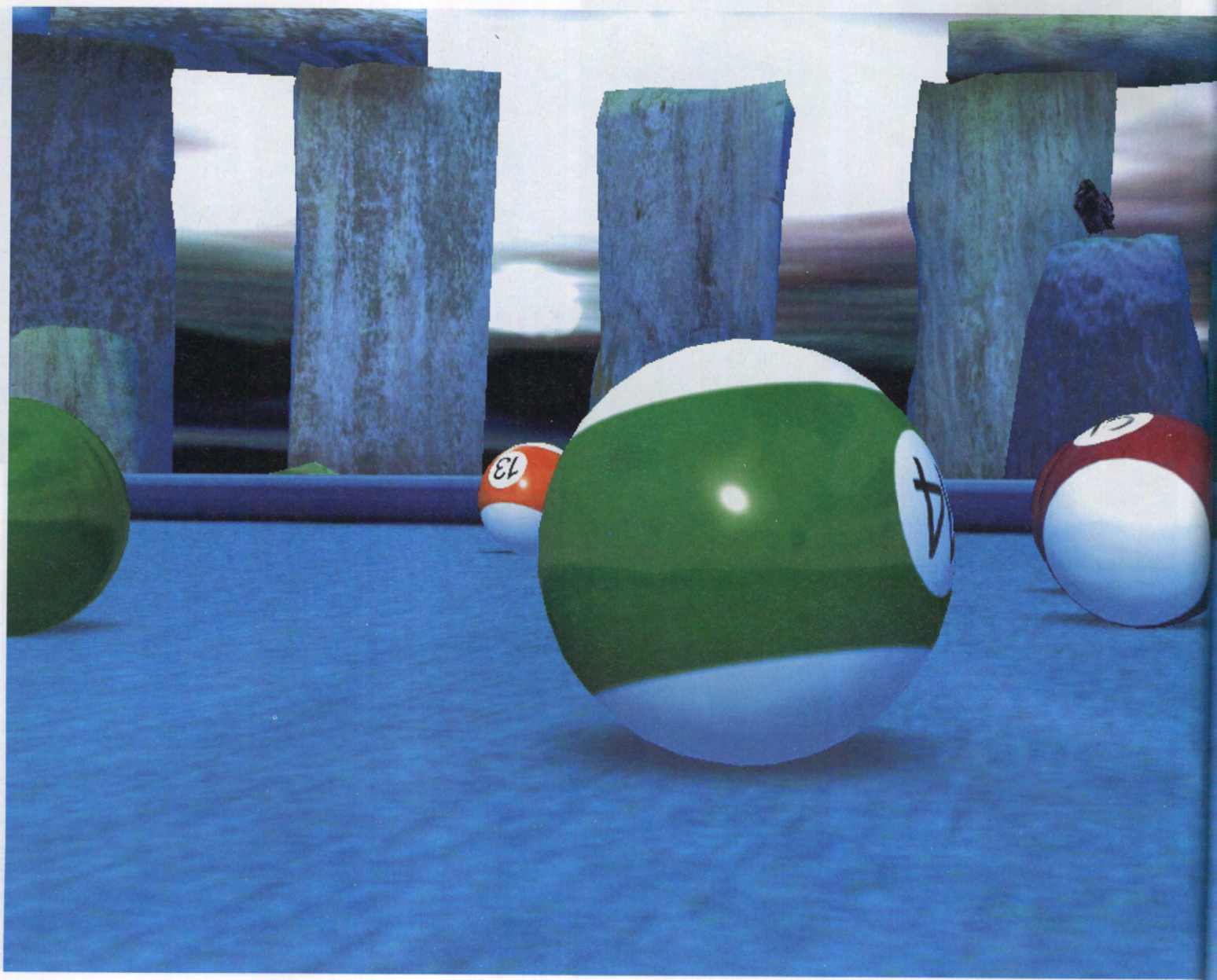
Since then he's remained one of the most popular of the Marvel heroes. And with a best-selling PlayStation game last year, and a brand new film, directed by Sam Raimi, due for release next year, the red-suited one who finds it hard to use conventional urinals is back where he belongs – on top of the game.

If you want to keep him there you're going to have to guide the spandex one through 34 (count 'em, go on...) missions, each coded to mimic an edition of the *Spider-Man* comic, and with an original storyline to match. As you'd expect, Spidey can punch, kick and generally move around with the agility of an 11-year-old Russian girl, but the game goes far beyond a simple platformer.

"As you'd expect, Spidey can punch, kick and generally move around with the agility of an 11-year-old Russian girl"

The first mission involves a bank heist, a bit of web-slinging, some *Metal Gear Solid* stealth moves, and a sodding-huge bomb to defuse. The fact that this game is infused with different elements like this is the reason that it's garnered praise and high review scores on both PlayStation and Dreamcast. According to a spokesperson at Activision, the game is going to be a direct port of these two games, although we've yet to confirm how the control system will work, however, the surprise that a certain skateboarding game gave us upon its release last year, you could be in for a big treat when the game is finally released in September this year. PZ





TOP STORY

Rack 'em up...

JIMMY WHITE'S CUEBALL WORLD

Pot the reds and screw back...

SNOOKER LOOPY STEVE HILL

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Awesome Developments
PUBLISHER Virgin Interactive
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE September 2001
WEBSITE www.awesome.uk.com

IN SUMMARY

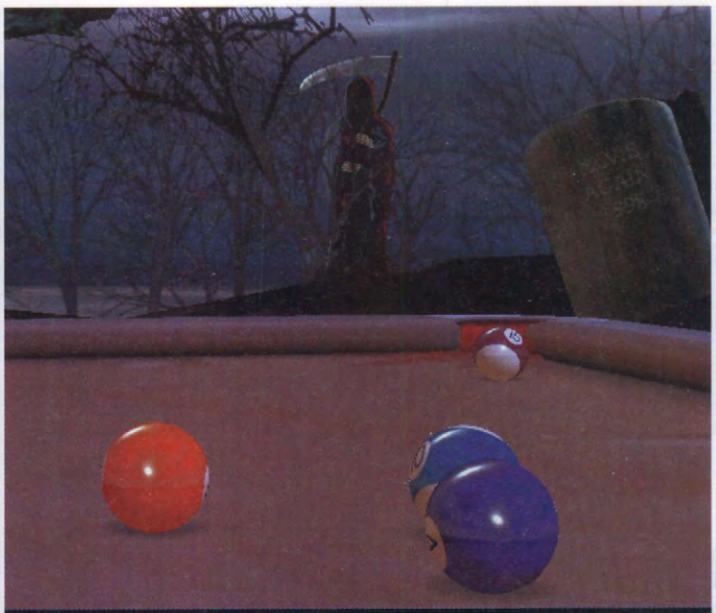
Maverick snooker player, Jimmy White, is your guide on a diverse world tour, taking in such disparate locations as Stonehenge, Hong Kong, and a desert island. While you're there, you can have a game of pool, snooker, billiards or even thumb-wrestling.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

When it comes to snooker and pool games, Awesome Developments boss Archer McLean has a long history. This latest Jimmy White game will feature eight different locations, unsurpassed ball physics, a variety of animated player hands and four sub-games, including a reappearance of the excellent darts.



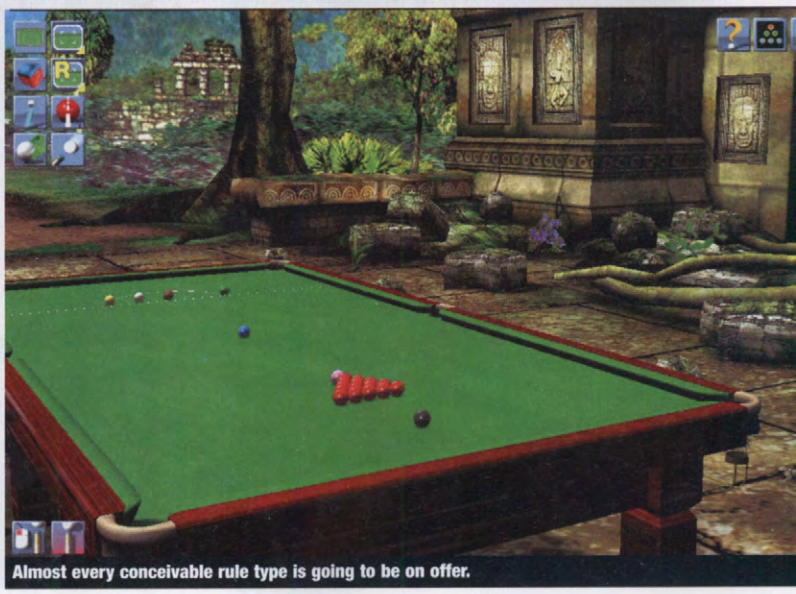
Exotic locations, including inside Jimmy White's PC.



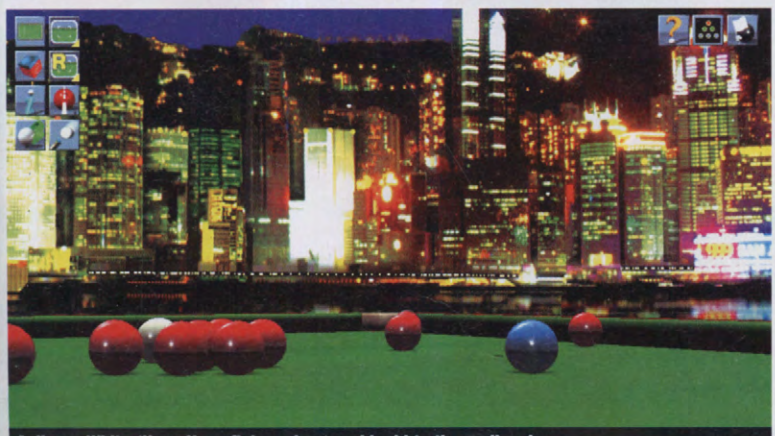
So realistic you can taste the cue chalk.



State of the art ball kinetics are promised.



Almost every conceivable rule type is going to be on offer.



A Jimmy White, 'Hong Kong flu' no show could add to the realism here.

One of the most naturally talented snooker players ever to grace the green baize, it's a travesty that Jimmy White has never managed to win the World Championship. Always the bridesmaid, never the bride, White's progress at The Crucible has more often than not been scuppered by his nemesis, Stephen Hendry, the dour Scot ensuring that White has never scored the coveted Embassy trophy. He's lifted a host of lesser trinkets though, and in fact the vast majority of them are stored in boxes in the basement of Archer McLean's Northamptonshire mansion.

It is here that *PC ZONE* were due to meet up with White to discuss his key role in the development of *Cueball World*, but unfortunately Jimmy reported a case of food poisoning at three o'clock that morning, presumably contracted at Royal Ascot, where he was pictured in a tabloid newspaper on the same day.

It wasn't a complete waste of time though, as Archer himself was in residence, and as chief of Awesome Developments he is equally qualified to discuss the game. In fact, why bother with White at all? The man is clearly a loose cannon, a man of no fixed abode with a career that would appear to have long since peaked, the Whirlwind now reduced to playing cheesy stateside pool tournaments.

Virgin is sticking with him though, as is McLean, who explains: "He's a household name. Stephen Hendry is a brilliant snooker player, but he's a bit of a machine, he's not a character. Jimmy is a real Cockney rogue."

He certainly is, and his cheeky chappy persona has been exploited to the full in this version of the game, where White introduces the various exotic real-world locations. The filming was far from straightforward though, with White punctuating his numerous mistakes with the word "bollocks", apparently in an attempt to prevent their later use (although an outtakes section is planned). Jimmy eventually mastered the skill of talking to camera, although not before being "taken round the garden for a few vodkas and a smoke."

These fully animated environments may look a bit fancy, but what on Earth do they have to do with potting balls? Essentially, they provide an antidote to the somewhat dry surroundings of the previous game, which were actually modelled on Archer's own snooker room. Four sub-games, including crazy golf-like pool stunt tables and classic British darts have also been thrown in.

As for the action itself, world-class 3D physics are promised, as well as a series of opponents represented by highly detailed animated hands. As Archer says: "We can tweak the maths of the AI players to represent any type of human player, whether it's a safety shot type of player, a Steve Davis-type character, or someone like Jimmy who takes wild trick shots and gets them in." Sounds great. It's only a shame that the man himself couldn't be there to show us some. PZ

"Jimmy eventually mastered the skill of talking to camera, although not before being 'taken round the garden for a few vodkas and a smoke'"





TOP STORY

Mowing the law

GRAND THEFT AUTO 3

Running down cops is more fun than ever in 3D

★ **IN THE HAMMER LANE** ANTHONY HOLDEN

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER DMA Design
PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE March 2002
WEBSITE www.grandtheftauto3.com

IN SUMMARY

The massively popular *GTA* series moves away from its distinctive top-down style into a more familiar third-person 3D affair with this third instalment. Loads of vehicles, weapons and mission types will be available to enhance the now familiar combination of carjacking, shooting and reckless driving.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

The talented bunch at DMA might just have got the 3D transition spot on, capturing the essence of the first and best *GTA* game, while expanding it in every direction. The depth and attention to detail already evident in the gameworld is extremely impressive.





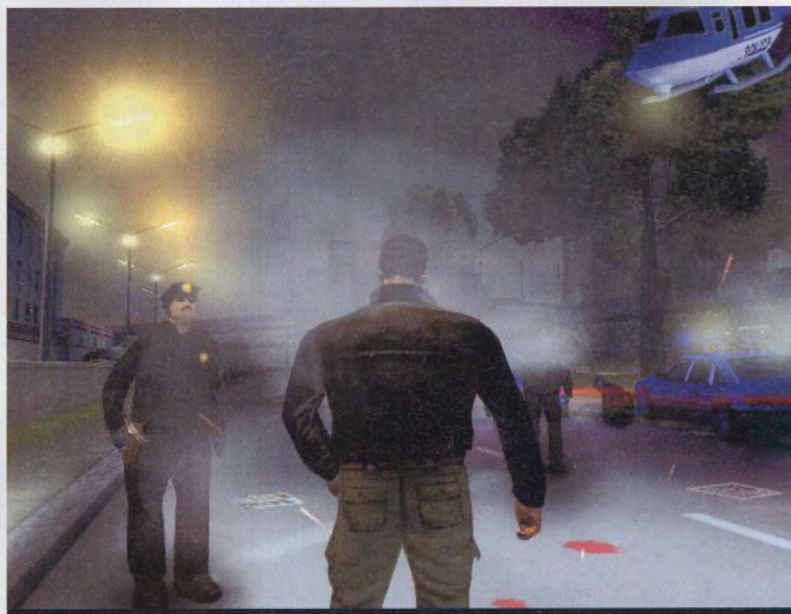
There's a gang war going on and you're in it up to your neck.



Liberty City is completely fleshed out with laws, ethics and a thriving AI populace.



Jacking a vehicle will still be a simple one-button action.



The police work strategically with FBI, army and SWAT forces to track you down.

Much as the 2D purists insisted that it would dilute the concept and destroy the game's refreshing gameplay-over-graphics ethos, it was inevitable that the *Grand Theft Auto* series would eventually make the move to full 3D. Taking a third-person perspective and returning to many of the ideas of the original game, *GTA3* is already two-thirds complete and looking like an absolute cracker. Obviously it will be a different game from the top-down affairs we're used to, but progress so far suggests a successful translation of the game's overall feel into a 3D world. The screenshots available to date aren't necessarily mind-blowing, but a glance at some of the game's massive array of features and gameplay options are enough to get any carjacking fan in a lather.

Clearly setting out to better the previous games and its imitators in every possible way, the game takes place in a convincing and thriving city populated by hundreds of unique pedestrians, police, SWAT teams, army units and vehicles. As well as just jacking over 40 types of cars, bikes and trucks, you'll be able to commandeer a variety of boats and even police helicopters, each promising unique and well-refined handling characteristics, designed to capture just the right balance between realistic modelling and arcade fun. Car damage is also modelled at an advanced level, each road machine having 18 deformable panels, which will take damage and even fall off, eventually leading to the vehicle exploding. The go-anywhere, do-anything approach of the former games will still operate, though a real-time day/night cycle and strict appointment times will help maintain progress. More than 80 gangland missions and 50 optional side-missions will be available in your bid to reach the top of the criminal underworld, with objectives including assassination, vehicle pursuit and demolition jobs. A variety of weapons will also become available through the course of the game, including baseball bats, M-16s, rocket launchers, Molotov cocktails and flame-throwers.

One of the most promising indications that DMA is doing more than simply changing the in-game perspective of the series is the new emphasis on cause and effect in the game. You'll need to take a lot more care with your criminal activities this time around, and you won't attract the attention of the rozzers if you can cover your tracks well enough. For example, if you're on top of a building taking a sniper shot at an enemy, time is of the essence, so you take your shot even though there might happen to be a few bystanders nearby. Assuming you are successful, your target's head will explode in a cartoonish display of gore, and pedestrians standing near the victim will react accordingly, screaming and wiping the splattered blood from their faces. Not only this, but others will run for the nearest payphone or fetch a mobile from their pocket to bring down the law. Of course, dead men tell no tales, so a few well-placed slugs could save you some hassles with the oinks at a later date. It's this sort of attention into creating a consistent gameworld that promises to make *GTA3* an exceptionally satisfying experience, the only problem being that we're going to have to wait six months after the console release before we get it on the PC. We'll see about that... PCZ

"Your target's head will explode in a cartoonish display of gore, with pedestrians screaming and wiping the splattered blood from their faces"

BULLETIN

CHEER UP

NEWS EDITOR Anthony Holden



In Inside Games this month, Mike Anderiesz contends that the industry's creative voice has been quashed by increasing commercial pressures, the ingenuity evident in the 'Golden Age' of games diluted by the need for ever bigger development teams and ever more predictable profit margins.

He's certainly got a point, and yet the games being made today continue to entertain and exhilarate us, continue to push forward into exciting new realms, even if new genres are not created every week like they were in the early years. The industry has undeniably whittled its mainstays down into a fairly narrow selection of genres – shooters, racers, RTSs, MMORPGs, you know them only too well. It may seem like a limited choice given the theoretically infinite possibilities for interactive entertainment, and yet we never seem to tire of these choices. While it could be argued that we are just easily amused, I'm more inclined to see it as a great reflection of the ingenuity that is evident in today's industry.

Genre-master Martin Scorsese has often defended the concept, saying that working within established genres doesn't necessarily confine the artist, so much as help channel the artist's tastes and politics through a recognisable medium. While gameplay genres are not strictly comparable with thematic genres, there is still some truth in this idea when applied to games. No more is this evident on the page opposite, where we have the incredible looking futuristic action game *Halo* preparing to rock the shooter genre to its very foundations. Elsewhere in the mag *AvP2*, *Project Eden*, and *Grand Theft Auto 3*, not to mention the stunning line-up of RTSs in our special strategy feature, all display the ability of contemporary designers to work within a well-worn genre yet continue to innovate and excite.

Mike's still got a great point, and let's face it, there is an awful lot of rubbish being made in this industry, but it's certainly not going downhill fast. We plan to make Inside Games a regular feature of the Bulletin from now on, and next issue Mike will continue his analysis with a look to the future. Rest assured, it won't be all doom and gloom.

TECHHEAD

All the latest techie-type stuff for hardware geeks

P.20



THE PCZONE CHARTS

Top of the Pops

P.23

ChartTrack



ME'S A STARFIGHTER

LucasArts • ETA Late 2001 • www.lucasarts.com

Another *Episode I* port on the way

Having received lavish praise from the PlayStation press (as does every PS2 game), LucasArts has decided to port its 3D space combat game *Star Wars: Starfighter* to the PC, although, we expect the PC incarnation will more closely resemble the Special Edition version currently headed for Xbox.

Special or not, *Starfighter* will certainly feature space-arcade action set, of course, in a galaxy far, far away. Unfortunately, unlike the rest of the *Star Wars* PC games currently in development (*Galactic Battlegrounds*, *Galaxies*, *Knights Of The Old Republic* and *Jedi Outcast*), *Starfighter* is set in and around *The Phantom Menace* universe, which means art deco paperweight-style spaceships and gargling gungans, rather than sleek X-wings and asthmatic stormtroopers. Still, for all that, PS2 *Starfighter* was more than just a fun diversion.

As well as a reasonably decent storyline, we can expect to be flying three varieties of spacecraft over and around the hateful world of Naboo, as we battle to break the Trade Federation blockade. We can expect 19 single-player missions, enhanced graphics from the PS2 game and a cheaper price. However, no multiplayer options are planned, even though it would make perfect sense. In a complete flight of fancy, we'd like to think that porting simultaneously to two online-capable platforms with similar architecture (that's the PC and Xbox, for those who've been snoozing), would double the chances of LucasArts adding additional features such as online play. Maybe we're just full of Banta poodoo, though.



Coo, just like the film.



Battle across space and across three different planets.

INSIDE GAMES

Mike Anderiesz looks to the past in an attempt to understand the present...

P.26



WAITING TO HAPPEN

Richie Shoemaker goes back to school

P.29

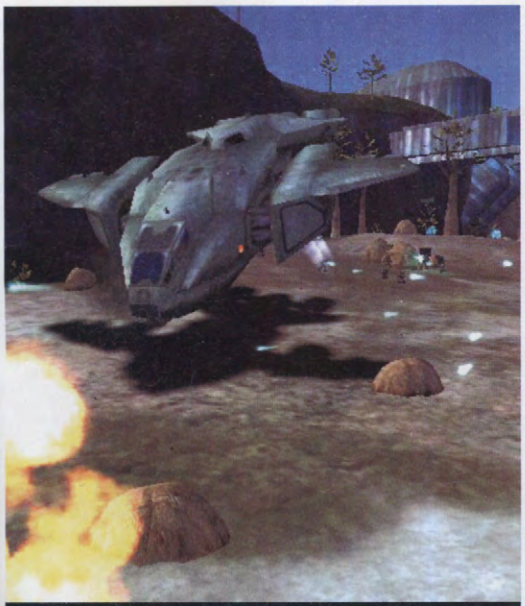


MAN WHO KNOWS

It's all too easy in this sordid industry

P.30





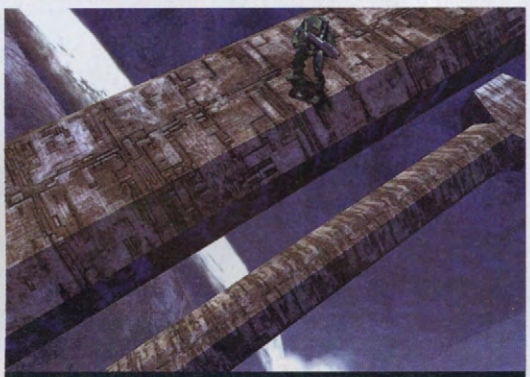
You'll be able to pilot a variety of vehicles, dropships included.



The human race is fighting a losing battle against an alliance of alien races known as the Covenant.



The weapon effects look fantastic in motion.



Action takes place on and around a giant space ring or 'halo'.



Armed passenger vehicles take a lead from *Tribes*.

HALO ONLINE: ONLY ON THE PC

Microsoft • ETA TBC • www.bungie.com/products/halo/halo.htm

Despite all the rumours, *Halo* will come to the PC, complete with online multiplay

Halo is one of the most eagerly anticipated action games currently in the pipeline, and yet it continues to receive relatively little coverage even as it approaches its mandatory November completion date (to coincide with the US launch of Xbox). The reason for this is simple: Microsoft doesn't want the PC version of Bungie's squad-based action game to get too much attention, as *Halo* is the killer app it's depending on to sell its black monstrosity to a sceptical public. This is especially important now that Nintendo has pulled the rug on Bill Gates by announcing a Gamecube launch date two weeks before Xbox. As such, Microsoft has put a virtual gagging order on Bungie when it comes to PC-specific info, and there remains a great deal of conjecture on the Net as to whether the game will even appear on our monitors. Fear not, however, as *PC ZONE* can now confirm *Halo* will indeed be a PC release, though exact release dates remain uncertain, and it is sure to be at least a couple of months after the US Xbox launch. The wait will be worth it though, as not only does history dictate that the Xbox version will be a rush-job in order to meets its intractable deadline, but it has been officially confirmed there will be no online multiplayer option for the console version. Which means console owners will, as ever, be limited to, ahem, splitscreen play. The comment to this effect from Bungie's Matt Soell even implied the existence of a PC version: "Unfortunately it's not possible for us to code support for Internet play without more info than we have now... I should make clear that I'm talking specifically about the Xbox version of *Halo* here."

Details of *Halo*'s online play remain somewhat scarce, but a couple of modes including Capture The Flag were already playable at E3. A co-operative mode, a *Unreal Tournament* 'Assault' style mode and a 'Hunter' style mode, where one powered-up player takes on the rest, have also been hinted at. Deathmatch is not expected to be available, most likely because it goes against the team dynamic on which the game focuses. Several of the vehicles in the game are expected to be drivable in multiplay, including the jeep, alien skimmer craft and stealth tank. Each race will have access to a different set of vehicles and weapons, though stealing enemy vehicles is entirely encouraged. Weapons such as the harpoon, missile launcher, energy sword and flamethower also promise to keep things interesting.

In short, *Halo*'s multiplay looks just as spectacular as every other element of this indecently gorgeous shooter. And as a game originally intended for the PC, it seems only fair that the PC is the place where the game will truly shine.

YIPPEE-KI-YAY

Vivendi • Q4 2001 • www.piranha-games.com

One vest, no shoes, broken glass and a couple of guns, in *Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza*

What with the glare coming off games like *Duke* and *Medal Of Honor* at the moment, it's easy to miss some of the smaller FPS titles in production, such as *Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza*. It's a LithTech-powered shooter, and we can already guarantee it's going to be better than the dire *Die Hard Trilogy*.

We recently had a chat with developer Piranha, who assured us that the game will faithfully recreate the film. Although this entails setting the action in a uniform square block 40 levels high, it also means that classic scenes from the celluloid version can be incorporated into the game. While explaining this, our host got overly-animated and started jabbing the screen. "Look, McClane's in the vent and the guards are walking underneath. Do you remember that from the film? Do you?" Although the trigger for these events is scripted, once they've kicked in it's up to you to direct the action. And, of course, the 40 missions will contain plenty of scenarios not found in the film.

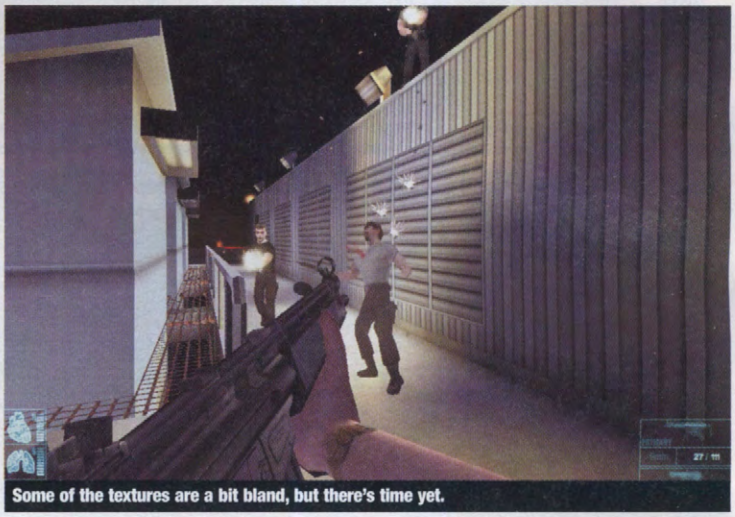
Piranha is incorporating a novel stamina and morale system into the game, with the state of your morale determining the reactions of hostages to your actions and the aggression level of the terrorists. Since Bruce spent as much time hiding as he did shooting, the game will also play heavily on stealth, although you'll still have a pretty nifty arsenal at your disposal if you happen to attract unwanted attention.

Weapons confirmed for the game include the M-60 and the Baretta 92F, and items such as McClane's police badge, although how this comes into play remains a mystery. We do know that you can dial up the helpful Officer Powell on your CB radio, and the voice on the other end will really be the fat guy from *Family Matters*.

Following the film closely probably means the game will be quite linear, which in itself is not a bad thing, although it means the developers are going to have to work hard and provide the sort of AI and pacing that fools you into thinking you're doing exactly what you want. We know the LithTech engine can deliver, and the plot's already in place. If the developers can fill in the blanks the classic film might finally get a game worthy of doing up its shoelaces.



This could be the *Diehard* game the film always deserved.



Some of the textures are a bit bland, but there's time yet.

A TASTE OF PARADISE

EA • ETA Q1 2002 • www.warthog.co.uk

Bounty Hunter: A natural blend of FPS enrobed in delicious space combat

Warthog's latest PC game has nothing to do with hairy fruit or chocolate bars, nor the collection thereof – more's the pity. Nope, *Bounty Hunter*, as you would rightfully expect from the makers of *Starlancer*, is a space combat action game, combining 3D action-oriented space combat and traditional first-person chainsaw-in-the-face action. Lordy, a cross-dressing genre-buster. Whatever next?

Those who might be hoping *Bounty Hunter* would be an open-ended *Privateer*-style trade 'em up are likely to be disappointed, as even though the title throws up images of stop/start sci-fi investigation and rounding up of dog-faced criminals, the game is in essence a linear one, as you play through a series of story-based missions, effortlessly switching between the two styles of play. Certainly on the basis of past glories, Warthog is sure to deliver a great-looking and highly charged experience, whether it can fuse two genres together without losing the best of each remains to be seen.



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SHORTS

THE SIMS GET IT ON



EA has announced a third add-on for the bestselling *The Sims*, due this autumn. It's called *Hot Date* and will allow those who religiously clean up after their Sims while filth builds up around them in the real world to further their virtual non-existence by playing out their dating fantasies. *Hot Date* will let you join dating agencies, have a quiet romantic meal then hop over to the park to cop off in the bushes. Dozens of new characters and more than 100 new objects are promised, though we imagine a pair of Duo Balls won't be among them.

MECHSPANSION



As is traditional with a new *Mechwarrior* game, Microsoft has announced plans to expand its mechanical trouser simulator with five new mechs and nine weapons, a single-player campaign and multiplayer modes. But seeing as no one in this country likes or buys *Mech* games, it's unlikely the expansion, entitled *Black Knight*, will ever be released in the UK, unless repackaged as some sort of 'Gold Edition'. Boo-hoo.

NEW WARHAMMER



Our good friends at THQ recently acquired the worldwide publishing rights to the *Warhammer 40,000* licence and have announced plans to publish a number of PC and console games based on the futuristic fantasy wargaming universe. This includes Climax's *Warhammer Online* MMORPG as well as any number of single-player titles. The first of the new games is set to appear mid next year, though to a cynical observer that may seem somewhat ambitious.



He's got a bomb in his head and a giant chip on his shoulder. No really, have a look.



DOG DAY RPG

ETA TBA • www.rebellion.co.uk

Someone's sure to lose their head in Rebellion's new RPG, *Wardog*

Normally we'd be pretty dubious about a game with a dog of a title like this, but since it's coming from our good friends at Rebellion (*Aliens Vs Predator*) we're willing to make an exception. Best known for its work on actiony shooting type games, *Wardog* sees the Oxford-based developers make a foray into RPG territory, and fairly traditional RPG territory at that. We're not talking orcs and hobgoblins here, but another well-worn RPG setting, the Dark Future. You know the one, where technology is developed enough to allow for guns, robots, neon lights and the like, but society has fallen to the point where swords, shields and chicks in metallic bikinis aren't out of the question either. It's a kind of worst of both worlds scenario, and you enter the fray as a chap who's definitely borne the brunt of society's collapse. As the titular Wardog, you find yourself in the unfortunate situation of having a remote-triggered bomb in your head, a charming measure designed to ensure your loyalty to the merciless Endtrail Enclave. Such is the lot of the Bombhead, a convicted criminal who's been sold into a life of slavery, though not before having their memory erased and cranium wired to blow. No prizes for guessing the nature of your quest then, as Wardog starts to uncover clues to his past, no doubt leading to the revelation that he was framed for his crimes and is actually a really nice guy with a much less silly name. While the constant threat of having your button pushed has a lot of intriguing gameplay possibilities, we'll be interested to see if Rebellion can take this otherwise cliché-ridden starting point and make something great out if it.

MECH WORRIER

ETA Q4 2001 • www.parkan.ru

The bizarre Russian mech strategy game they call *Parkan: Iron Strategy*

The developers of *Parkan: Iron Strategy* are clearly a bit loopy. As far as we can ascertain, their new action strategy game takes place in the 58th century, in a time when humankind has explored vast regions of the galaxy and established a network of teleport stations to link various habitable planets. Nothing too crazy about that, except that the website features a 30-page, incredibly dense and rather uninteresting history of the Parkan universe from the end of our century up till the 84th. This, I think you'll agree, is indisputable evidence of emotional imbalance. Luckily, the game itself appears to be much more accessible, blending elements of RTS and mech-based combat in a diverse variety of environments and terrain types. In the tradition of *Hostile Waters*, you'll be able to choose what level of engagement you take with the enemy, by either jumping into a warbot and leading your troops into some first-person *Shogo*-style action, or sitting back and directing your platoon remotely. The idea is that a gung-ho, all-guns-blazing approach always has a chance of succeeding, but if it fails you have the option of going back and building a more fortified base, spending time expanding your research tree and constructing a more powerful army of warbots. The action will skip between five different planets, all with flashy bump-mapped and highly-detailed environments. Let's just hope for the sake of the game that the fine line between genius and insanity is as fine as they say it is.



There's a fantastic alien feel to the game courtesy of the rich colour palette.



The warbot designs alone give the game huge appeal.

STICKING TO FORMULA

EA Sports • ETA autumn 2001 • www.imagespaceinc.com

Another issue, another F1 game



The best F1 game on the PC is about to get even better. Hopefully.

F1 Championship: Season 2000 turned out to be somewhat of a surprise package when it dropped onto our desks late last year, eclipsing Geoff Crammond's technically excellent if rather dull *Grand Prix 3* as the top F1 sim on the PC. And with EA never missing an opportunity to cash in on a good thing, it was just a matter of time until a sequel turned up.

F1 2001 is no simple rehash of *F1 Championship: Season 2000,* however, it's a genuine makeover. We saw some early code and the graphics looked near photo-realistic (no really), as the brand new engine was throwing up four times as many frames as *F1 2K* and better still, each object had four times as many polygons (apparently). Coo.

All the new teams and drivers from the current season will be present, in case you want to play as any of the new wave of no-hopers who usually retire before the end of the first lap. Developer Image Space was keen to point out that it's working hard to improve several key features, most notably the stability of multiplayer games, real-time variable weather and a heightened sensation of raw speed. We've been promised some updated code to play next issue, so we'll bring you more then. Till then, here's a pretty picture of a racing car for you to look at.



It's no Starship Enterprise, but it'll do.



Unfortunately, the graphics haven't been tweaked at all.

YOHOHO AND A BOTTLE OF ROMULAN ALE

Interplay • ETA August • www.interplay.com/sfc-op

Set your acronyms to stun, it's *ST: Starfleet Command – Orion Pirates*

Our favourite *Star Trek* RTS, *Starfleet Command,* takes a trip to the dark side this month, with stand-alone expansion pack *Orion Pirates.* The game, which may even have hit the shelves by the time you're reading this, promises to be as meaty as its title, with new skirmishes, a new race and a number of gameplay improvements. For the first time you'll get the chance to play as the ruthless Orion Pirates, a long-standing element of the *Star Trek* Universe.

For those who are not so familiar with the series, the Orion Pirates are a brutal force of privateers and criminals controlling various territories of Federation Space. They consist of eight cartels, each with unique histories, crew voices and identifying logos. Unfortunately, they all share the same ship types, interface and mission objectives, so there may be little to separate them in practice. The game features a 12-mission campaign plus 26 skirmish missions and three bonus missions based on the classic TV episode 'A Piece of the Action'. There's also a few new toys to play with, including heavy photons and shield-piercing phasers. For old *Starfleet Command* sea dogs, this expansion may be a bit bereft of novelty, as it uses exactly the same graphics engine and contains only a few new gameplay elements, so stay tuned for our final judgment next issue.

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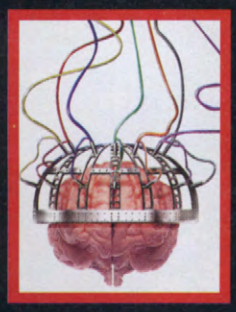
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TECHHEAD

NVIDIA's next product won't be the GeForce4, while Intel steps up the pace

TEFAL HEAD Carlos Ruiz

ENTER THE NFORCE

A graphics vendor trying its hand at motherboards? This should be good...

NVIDIA climbed to the top of the ladder a few years ago, and has totally dominated the high-end video card market since its innovative GeForce 256 effectively killed off the competition. With this kind of unparalleled success in the field, it's a bit surprising that it has decided to diversify so dramatically with the release of its first motherboard chipset, the nForce, designed primarily with 3D performance in mind.

It's an ambitious project, and only time will tell whether nForce motherboards turn out to be worth opting for as an alternative to the raft of reliable examples already available. In addition to looking fantastic on paper, the chipset must prove itself in real-world tests if users are to be convinced.



The nForce will carry a premium price – will it be worth it?

Luckily, it does look good on paper. Firstly, the obligatory integrated graphics chipset is essentially a GeForce2 MX running off an 8x AGP interface – pretty good, though most hardcore gamers will have a GeForce3 (or at least something a little more advanced) ready to occupy the AGP slot. Secondly, the integrated sound really is something to shout about. The Audio Processing Unit (APU) is more capable than an SB Live!, supporting DirectX 8.0, EAX and Dolby 5.1 in hardware, and not requiring any CPU power. You won't be needing a separate soundcard, that much is for sure.

The Dynamic Adaptive Speculative Pre-Processor predicts what kind of instructions the CPU will require by recognising patterns in its behaviour. This is similar to the Pentium 4's pipelining system, except that the processor is not shouldered with the work. Performance increases should be between 5-10 per cent in most operations.

The nForce also gives a full 4.2Gb/s of memory bandwidth with PC2100 SDRAM, which is around 3Gb/s more than conventional SDRAM, and a full 1Gb/s more than dual channel RDRAM. Its two independent memory controllers allow for sizeable amounts of versatility.

Can NVIDIA get it right first time in the motherboard arena? Many manufacturers are betting against it, but there would be few companies more able to spring a surprise than this upstart graphics vendor. Even if the nForce has teething troubles, you can bet the nForce2 will solve them and push the boundaries further still. Expect nForce motherboards to be released in the next couple of months, with www.nvidia.com on hand for more information.

INTEL TO HIT 20GHZ

The chip giant's latest roadmap shows rates of technological advance

Moore's Law dictates that the transistor density of silicon doubles roughly once every 18-24 months, and this is also a fair indicator of performance increases over the same period of time. Currently, Intel's Pentium 4 chips use 42 million transistors while Athlons use 37 million. This is in stark contrast to the days of 10-micron, when transistors numbered 2,300 and chips operated at a lowly 108KHz.

With such an astounding rate of technological advance, the industry can expect to hit a wall in the next 10-20 years, when transistor size begins to approach the atomic level. In the chart shown, the last figure (0.032-micron) is already dangerously close. This is, of course, when the transistors themselves cannot possibly be made any smaller.

Intel's roadmap shows that chip manufacturing will hit 0.13-micron this year and 0.09-micron by 2003. At this point, calculations suggest that 3.6GHz processors will be possible – while 2007 will allow for scorchingly fast 20GHz units.

Moore's Law should be accurate for another couple of decades yet, after which manufacturers might resort to using more elaborate three-dimensional layouts, larger chip sizes or more creative methods of utilising the transistors on current designs.

YEAR OF INSTALLATION	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009
MICRON TECHNOLOGY	0.35	0.25	0.18	0.13	0.09	0.065	0.045	0.032

FACTCANNON

Microsoft's Internet Explorer 6 will support the new P3P (Platform Privacy Preferences) standard, overhauling the traditional 'cookie' system in order to give users better control over what information they supply to advertisers through their surfing behaviour. As well as reducing nuisance adverts, this will allow for personalised ads – so accessing sport websites every day would result in plenty of Nike banners, for instance. IE6 will be available for download in August.

Creative Labs is set to roll out a new generation of soundcards featuring its latest EMU10K2 sound processor. The Sound Blaster Audigy series will be even more powerful and a have a greater range of supported effects than the Live!, as well as improved software and FireWire support. The usual variants will be available (MP3+, X-Gamer and Platinum), and you can find out more at www.soundblaster.com.

If you want to play all the latest PC games while commuting to work, Dell's latest Inspiron 8000 1000VT is the answer. The new laptop's specs include a 1GHz Pentium III processor, 15in SXGA TFT screen, 128Mb SDRAM, 20Gb hard disk, DVD-ROM, GeForce2 Go graphics with 32Mb of RAM, Harmon Kardon audio and Windows ME. The only problems are the £1,800 price tag, weight of around 8lbs, and the fact that you'll be lucky to get more than 90 minutes of battery life out of it.



As world governments ramp up threats of Internet censorship, the world's most notorious hacking collective, Cult Of The Dead Cow, are preparing a response of their own. Peekabooty is a web software program designed to evade all forms of government censorship on the Net, while operating stealthily to avoid detection. Originally scheduled for launch this month, Peekabooty was recently unveiled in demo form at hacker convention Def Con. Prominent Dead Cow member OXblood Ruffin claims the product requires further tuning to ensure user safety: "We don't want our users to attract the thought police because Peekabooty is operating promiscuously." Expect an official launch soon.



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There's a bar to retire to when you get tired of fragging.

A gamer's paradise, The Playing Fields is a computer games bar where you can relax and play games the way they are meant to be played – with someone else. Just a 30-second walk from Warren Street Tube station (Northern and Victoria lines), you can find it at 143 Whitfield Street, London, W1.

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You have to be aged at least 14 to play and ID may be required. The Playing Fields is open seven days a week from noon to 11pm (10pm on Sundays). For prices and more information, check out www.theplayingfields.co.uk.

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Turn to page 98 for details of the *PC ZONE* Readers' Challenge

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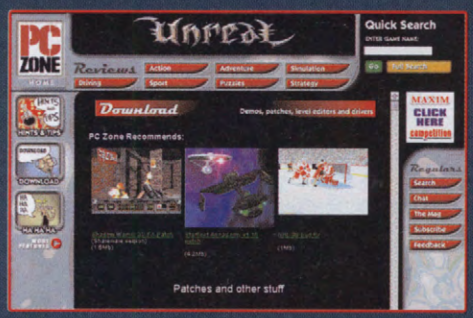
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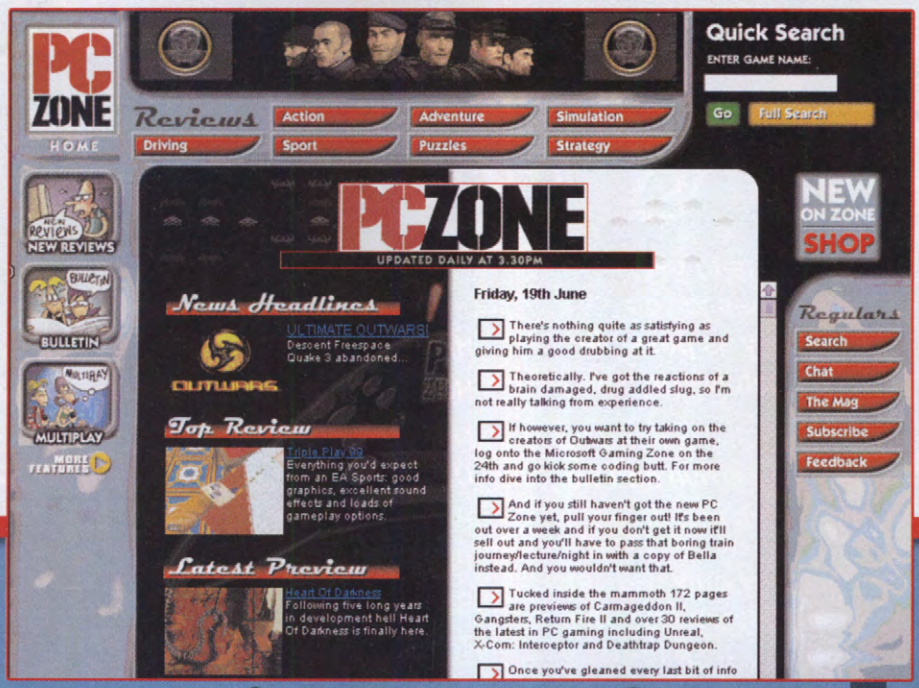


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CHARTS

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Justice is served this month as *Operation Flashpoint* storms the front.

THE Virgin megastores TOP10

JULY	AUGUST	TITLE	DEVELOPER	PUBLISHER	SCORE
NE	1	**HALF-LIFE: BLUE SHIFT**	GEARBOX	VIVENDI	78%
RE	2	HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS	VALVE	VIVENDI	95%
NE	3	DIABLO II – LORD OF DESTRUCTION	BLIZZARD	VIVENDI	83%
NE	4	OPERATION FLASHPOINT	BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE	CODEMASTERS	90%
NE	5	SUDDEN STRIKE FOREVER	CDV	CDV	75%
NE	6	Z: STEEL SOLDIERS	BITMAP BROTHERS	EON	90%
NE	7	EMPEROR: BATTLE FOR DUNE	WESTWOOD	EA	76%
3	8	BLACK & WHITE	LIONHEAD	EA	95%
8	9	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: 00/01	SPORTS INTERACTIVE	EIDOS	93%
9	10	BATTLE OF BRITAIN	ROWAN	EMPIRE	89%

THE ChartTrack TOP10 ELSPA

JUL	AUG	TITLE	DEVELOPER	PUBLISHER	SCORE
NE	1	OPERATION FLASHPOINT	BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE	CODEMASTERS	90%
NE	2	DIABLO II – LORD OF DESTRUCTION	BLIZZARD	VIVENDI	83%
NE	3	EMPEROR: BATTLE FOR DUNE	WESTWOOD	EA	76%
2	4	THE SIMS: HOUSE PARTY	MAXIS	EA	50%
1	5	BLACK & WHITE	LIONHEAD	EA	95%
5	6	HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS	VALVE	VIVENDI	95%
NE	7	SUDDEN STRIKE FOREVER	CDV	CDV	75%
6	8	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 00/01	SPORTS INTERACTIVE	EIDOS	93%
3	9	COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS	GSC	CDV	89%
4	10	THE SIMS	MAXIS	EA	86%

Compiled by Chart Track © ELSPA

COMPETITION

WIN THE ENTIRE VIRGIN TOP 10!

Once again, *PC ZONE* and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win every game in the current Top 10. All you have to do to enter the draw is answer this simple question:

QUESTION: What's the three-word subtitle of Bohemia Interactive's *Operation Flashpoint*?

Just answer the above question and send it on a postcard, along with *all* the information requested, to the address below.

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Are you a current subscriber to *PC ZONE*?

Answers on a postcard to: *PC ZONE* Chart Compo (CPCZ09A), Dennis Publishing, PO Box 154, Bradford BD1 5RZ. Closing date: August 23, 2001

Terms and conditions: winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply.

THE BUZZ ON THE STREETS

Well, it is finally good to see some quality games in the charts. But as we know, a bad smell lingers and *The Sims* still takes up two spots. At least *Operation Flashpoint* holds the number one spot, but it's a bit disappointing to see *B&W* drop down. I suppose it's expected with the range of opinions held about it.

vortex

Only two *Sims* titles? Would have thought *Blue Shift* would be there by now (it sold out in Cardiff within two days), but the *Generations* pack is still there. Hehe – more noobs to kill brutally in *C-S*. *Emperor* is doing better than *B&W* this month too – good. My copy of *B&W* reset itself and I had to restart my tiger from level 1. Grrr.

YukkaSpecial

What surprises me is that *Half-Life* is still in the charts – what's it been, three years? Everybody and their dog must own it by now; still a damn fine game though. Good to see *Operation Flashpoint* in the top spot – a quality title despite the absence of Mr Sheen (polish).

Nothing3

Nice to see *CM* still there with the new release imminent. Getting better people… only two *Sims* games in the charts now. That's good, but let's try and get it down to one next month.

ParaMite100

What's going on? Why is there a good game at the top of the charts? Are you people feeling OK? Hey… the housewives have stopped buying *The Sims*! It's a strange world.

paulwade5537

CHART COMMENT

BASED ON CHART TRACK TOP 10

Well, blow me, would you look at that? Our prayers have finally been answered, with the most respectable Top 10 line-up we have seen for some time. Four Classics, three Awards For Excellence… did the game-buying public suddenly develop some taste or are there just a lot of great games around at the moment? *Flashpoint* deservedly takes its place at the top, while *Tropico* has disappeared completely. The other great news is that Norton Antivirus, which we've had to remove from the 'leisure software' charts every month since time immemorial, has finally been forced out by real software. And for those who were wondering, *Blue Shift* is at the top of the Budget Charts. Well done, unwashed masses – keep up the good work.

Anthony Holden

RETRO CHARTS

1 YEAR AGO

1. **Shogun: Total War** *(EA)*
2. **The Sims** *(EA)*
3. **Champ Man 99/00** *(Eidos)*
4. **Diablo II** *(Havas)*
5. **AOE II: The Age Of Kings** *(Microsoft)*

2 YEARS AGO

1. **SW: The Phantom Menace** *(Activision)*
2. **Champ Man 3** *(Eidos)*
3. **ST: Birth Of The Federation** *(Hasbro)*
4. **SW: Episode 1 – Racer** *(Activision)*
5. **Dungeon Keeper 2** *(Bullfrog)*

5 YEARS AGO

1. **F1GP2** *(MicroProse)*
2. **Duke Nukem 3D** *(Eidos)*
3. **Theme Park** *(EA)*
4. **Civilization II** *(MicroProse)*
5. **Worms** *(Ocean)*

SHORTS

HE'S BACK



"Further strengthening it's position as a global leader in mass-market interactive entertainment..." so starts the recent press release from publisher Infogrames, letting us know they have four games in development based on Arnie's two *Terminator* flicks. Although, it's probably the same game in production for four different platforms. What form the games will take is as yet unknown, however, the first is due for release next spring – which as we all know means the one after. And yes, every press release starts the same way.

ATARIGRAMES?

Remember Atari? Of course you do, and after acquiring the name through its recent Hasbro buy-out, Infogrames is keen to shift emphasis away from old conversions and build on the brand awareness by using it for a number of key titles, including the *Unreal* series. As Bruno Bonnell, head of Infogrames, says, "If Atari decided to launch as a company today, it wouldn't do *Pong*..." The man's obviously a genius.

PRIMED FOR ZUXXEZ



As RTS fans may recall, German publisher/developer Topware went belly up earlier this year, leaving several popular franchises, such *Earth 2150*, in limbo. Some ex-Topware folks have now formed a new company, Zuxxez, with the plan of resurrecting the best Topware properties as well as launching into new areas. The promising RTS *World War 3*, covered in *Zone* #104, will continue development at Zuxxez, and a sequel to *Earth 2150* titled *Lost Souls* is also on its way. Other projects include the point and click adventure *Orlando Jones*, and a game based on the Troma Studios licence.



Sometimes stealth just isn't an option.



If your wingman dies, things get a lot more difficult. So don't shoot him.

TWO MAN ARMY

Virgin Interactive • ETA Q4 2001 • www.venom3d.com

Codename: Outbreak puts a fresh spin on the single-player FPS

Until recently going under the rather bland working title 'Venom', *Codename Outbreak* is a tactical FPS from the Russian developer behind the excellent *Cossacks*. There's been an early beta of the game kicking around the office for the last few days, and we can safely report that it's looking quite interesting, though, in its current state at least, not nearly as polished as the previous offering from GSC Game World. The premise revolves around the near-future invasion of Earth by a race of suspiciously familiar-looking parasitic aliens, intent on occupying human bodies and thereby waging war on the remaining populace. You enter the fray as an elite soldier, armed with a futuristic swivelly combo weapon incorporating machine gun, sniper rifle, rocket launcher, laser, flare gun and shotgun. Crucially, you are also accompanied by a wingman, an AI team mate, on each of the 13 single-player missions. You can drop to a third-person view when necessary, as well as switching freely between your two characters, and you need to manage your two-man assault wisely to complete each level. Controlling your sidekick is a simple affair, with orders restricted to four simple hotkey commands (cover me, assault, hold position, hold fire), though at this stage of code your buddy is just as likely to shoot you in the back as take out an enemy.

While unremarkable in many ways, the game does excel in several key areas, most notably the enemy AI, which is built around complex hearing and sight algorithms. The combination of stealth and diversionary tactics should also make for varied and rewarding gameplay. Review code is not far off, so expect a decisive verdict next issue.



Looks nice, though we suspect these pics may be mock-ups.



Just imagine 32 of these bad boys having it out online.

COMANCHE 4

Novalogic • ETA winter 2001 • www.novalogic.com

You can almost feel the rotor wash

Chopper games have a bit of a bad reputation these days, often being viewed as the poor inbred cousin of the flight sim family. One possible reason for this, apart from the fact that many of them are utter rubbish, is that helicopter games tend to be much more arcadey in nature, which is a good thing as far as we're concerned. The most arcade of all the big franchises has to be the long-running *Comanche* series, so we were more than a little interested when Novalogic announced the forthcoming release of the inevitable *Comanche 4*. Based on the US Army's next-gen recon chopper, the RAH-66, the game promises a variety of reconnaissance, ground attack and air combat missions, with plenty of scope for the kind of low-altitude daredevilry that chopper games excel at. The usual assortment of real-world locations is promised, including urban settings, à la *Blue Thunder*, tropical islands, à la *Magnum PI*, and jungle environments, à la the flashback scenes in *Blue Thunder*. While the shots released so far are all fairly early, and probably sneakily pre-rendered to meet the announcement date, it's already looking suitably flash and effects-laden. The requisite 3D virtual cockpit and assortment of vicious weaponry will of course be available, though the prospect of 32-player online multiplay seems the most exciting new feature touted by Novalogic. Who knows, we might even put away our railguns and AK-47s for a few days come the launch date.

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'Make no mistake, this is a very special game indeed.' 9/10

PC gameplay GOLD









Mucky Foot Productions

PC CD-ROM

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EIDOS INTERACTIVE

www.eidos.com

INSIDE GAMES

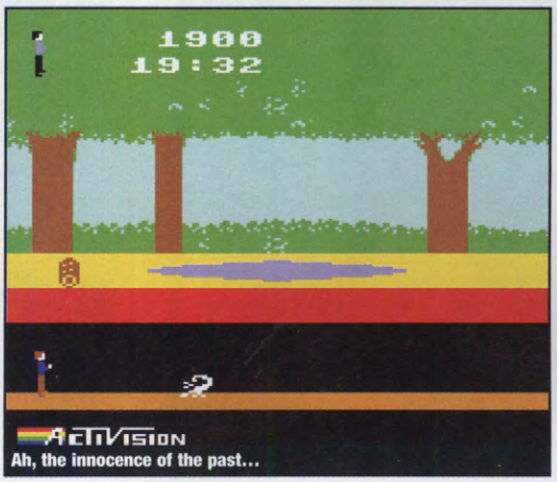
STATE OF THE ART – PART ONE: THE PAST

Why are we here, what does it all mean and where are we heading? In the first of a two-part exploration, veteran games writer *Mike Anderiesz* finds we have to return to the past to make sense of the present

Twenty years. That's how long I've put into videogames, braving the vagaries of graphics card drivers and watching girlfriends storm out in despair. The big question is why did I bother?

Don't get me wrong, I love the stuff. RPG, RTS, FPS, if it's got three letters, I'm on it like Bill Gates at the neck of a competitor. But all the same, even a die-hard games fan must look at their favourite pastime and wonder what they get out of it. The admiration of friends, better hand-eye co-ordination perhaps, but what else? Videogames may be improving in terms of graphics and sound, but in many other respects they appear to be going nowhere fast.

The videogame is around 30 years old (dating it from Nolan Bushnell's *Space War*) although it took until the mid '70s for the masses to wake up to it (via the Atari VCS console) and the mid '80s for a UK development community to respond to the challenge (via the ZX Spectrum.) A full 15 years ago we already had universes to explore (*Elite*), mythical worlds to conquer (*Lords Of Midnight*), races to win (*Pole Position*) and tombs to raid (*Pitfall*). We even had online multiplayer games (*MUD*). Admittedly, by today's standards they looked pretty awful and had no pretensions to AI or 3D to complicate matters, but at least they had ambition – *The Sentinel* crammed 10,000 3D levels onto an Amiga, for Geoff's sake – show me a modern game that comes close. Games were designed to push the boundaries of their machines and challenge the skill of their creators. In comparison today's games are slick, formulaic and designed to shift as many units as possible. When *The Sentinel* returned for a 1998 remake there were only 600 levels, a subtle indication that the age of the epic game had already passed.



Ah, the innocence of the past...


Then again, progress does have its good points.

"The mid to late '80s were a real blast," recalls early videogame music maestro Rob Hubbard. "It was a very creative period as there were basically no rules, and people were creating new types of games and graphic effects. Most of the machines were 8-bit, so there was another challenge in trying to push the hardware and CPU to the limit."

It was also a time of supreme innocence, of developer contracts relying on a shake of hands, 17-year-olds coding through the night so Aunt Mabel could put the labels on the cassettes in the morning, mail order distribution before e-commerce lent it credibility. The industry that began in the mid '80s and put Britain on the developer map, was so chaotic the programmer was king by default – he, after all, was the one with the magic fingers. If he didn't come up with the goods, the whole pyramid collapsed.

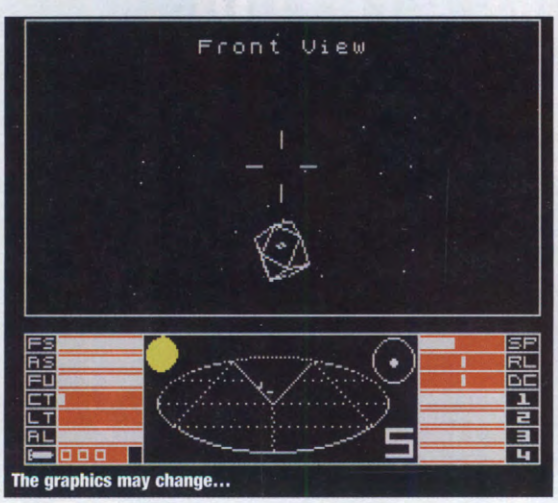
"It was a time of supreme innocence, with 17-year-olds coding through the night so Aunt Mabel could put the labels on the cassettes in the morning"

"I think the cottage industry of the time was more driven by programming innovation than by anything else," says Sandy White, author of the Spectrum classic *3D Ant Attack*. "If you were the first to write a starfield or vector graphics or got a new sound out of the sound hardware, you could wrap a game around it, and sell it off the back of that. It would be difficult to do that now, technical development has become quite incremental."

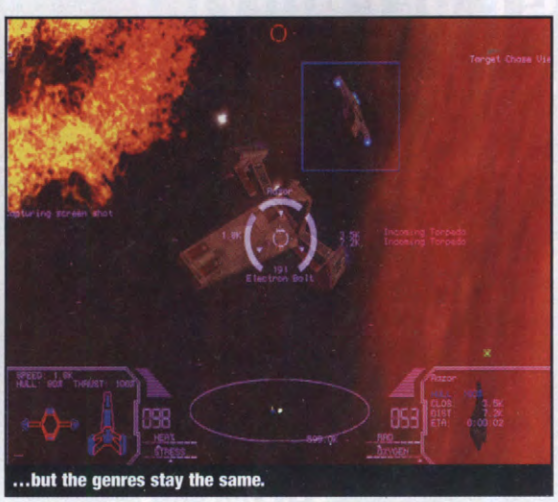
BLOW OUT

The main consequence of this, of course, is that modern platforms (including the PC) require large development teams, as many as 100 people to create the equivalent of what a Tony (*Captive*) Crowther or Andrew (*Rainbow Islands*) Braybrook used to knock up on their own. This in turn means that once you have assembled and paid for such a team you obviously need a commercially viable product for them to work on.

"Today we spend millions of dollars making games," continues Hubbard, "so no one takes any risks with new types of entertainment. This is a pity, because I'm sure there could be many more different types of games or interactive entertainment that could be created. Marketing people just don't want to take the risks."



The graphics may change...


...but the genres stay the same.

Indeed, if videogames ever had the potential to become an art form, it surely gave it up long ago in exchange for a series of fat cheques. Most of the true mavericks were ground out by the need to constantly master new hardware or were simply marginalised by an industry that was growing more 'businesslike' in the narrowest sense of the phrase.

"When I was in the industry we were pioneers – paving the way for the future," recalls Anita Sinclair, co-creator of early graphic adventures such as *The Pawn* and *Guild Of Thieves*. "What's happened in the past five years is that games have lost their novelty. People are aiming games at younger and less sophisticated audiences. Today's developers are writing in their minds for 10 to 12-year-olds."



The solo efforts of the past were remarkable achievements...


Although, creativity *can* still thrive in the right team environment.

LOSING CONTROL

So, why did it happen? Well, the declining importance of the programmer is certainly a major factor. Programmers and designers no longer have sufficient control over the medium they helped create, and certainly far less than their creative equivalents in the movie business. As teams get larger, so individual voices are drowned out, which leads to those teams breaking away in search of more independence. Look what happened to Bullfrog – king of the original game one minute, little more than a multimedia McDonalds the next.

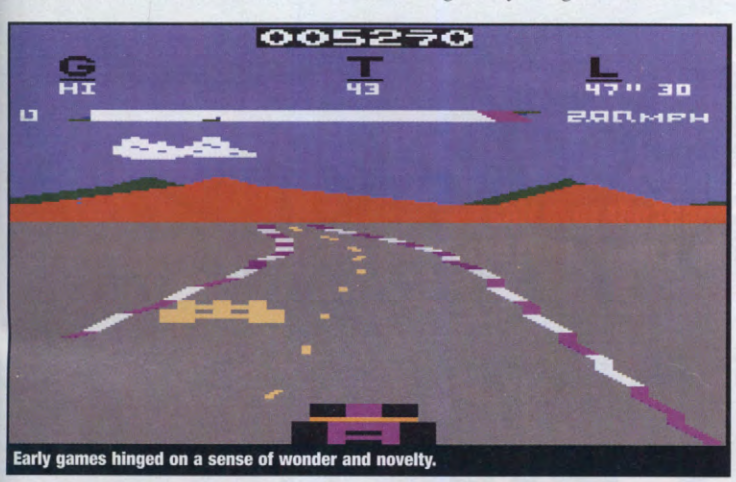
The truth is that game developers have always been frustrated artists stuck in an industry that has no interest in creating art. With marketing departments and shareholders constantly demanding *Tomb Raider 5*, is it any surprise that someone like Jeff Minter – the psychedelic genius behind *Llamatron* and *Revenge Of The Mutant Camels* – would never find his niche in the '90s. Still beavering away from his farmhouse in North Wales, he sees the designer's independence as a crucial motivation the industry has lost.

"Basically I like to work with people who don't try to tell me what to do or what type of game to create," he says. "People who trust me enough just to let me go away and get on with it without intervening all the time. I can't be dealing with any of that bollocks of having to storyboard a game design and then have to get it past some kind of scrutiny just to get the project approved. Bollocks to that. I'm a game designer."

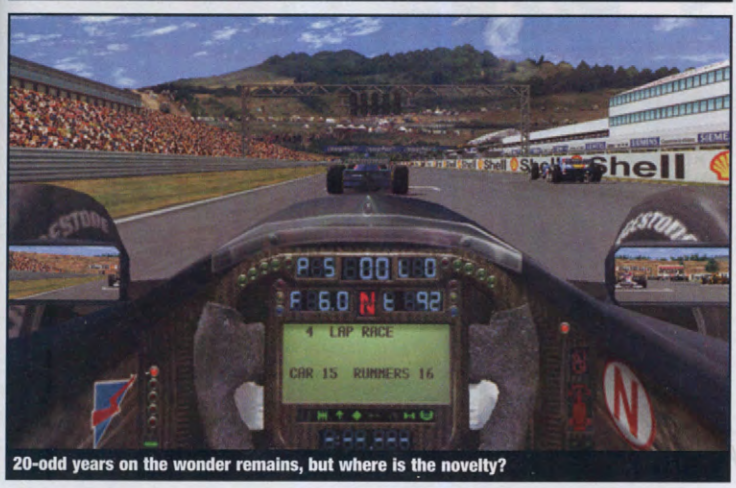
Of course, not all the 8-bit heroes have burned out or faded away. Miyamoto still guides the magic at Nintendo and people like Geoff Crammond, Archer McLean and David Braben are still making their own games almost single-handedly. Others wisely invested early profits to create substantial empires in their own image, most notably the Stamper and the Darling brothers with Rare and Codemasters respectively. However, compared to the movie business, star developers still enjoy pitifully short careers and precious little recognition. The question is, will money alone be enough to inspire the next generation of game gurus? Not according to the last lot.

"Sometimes I think I would like to write another game," concludes Anita Sinclair, "but there are other problems to solve that would be more rewarding." Given how few people even remember who she is, you can't exactly blame her.

Mike Anderiesz was launch manager of *MUD*, the original online RPG, way back in 1987. He is currently games correspondent for the *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian*.



Early games hinged on a sense of wonder and novelty.



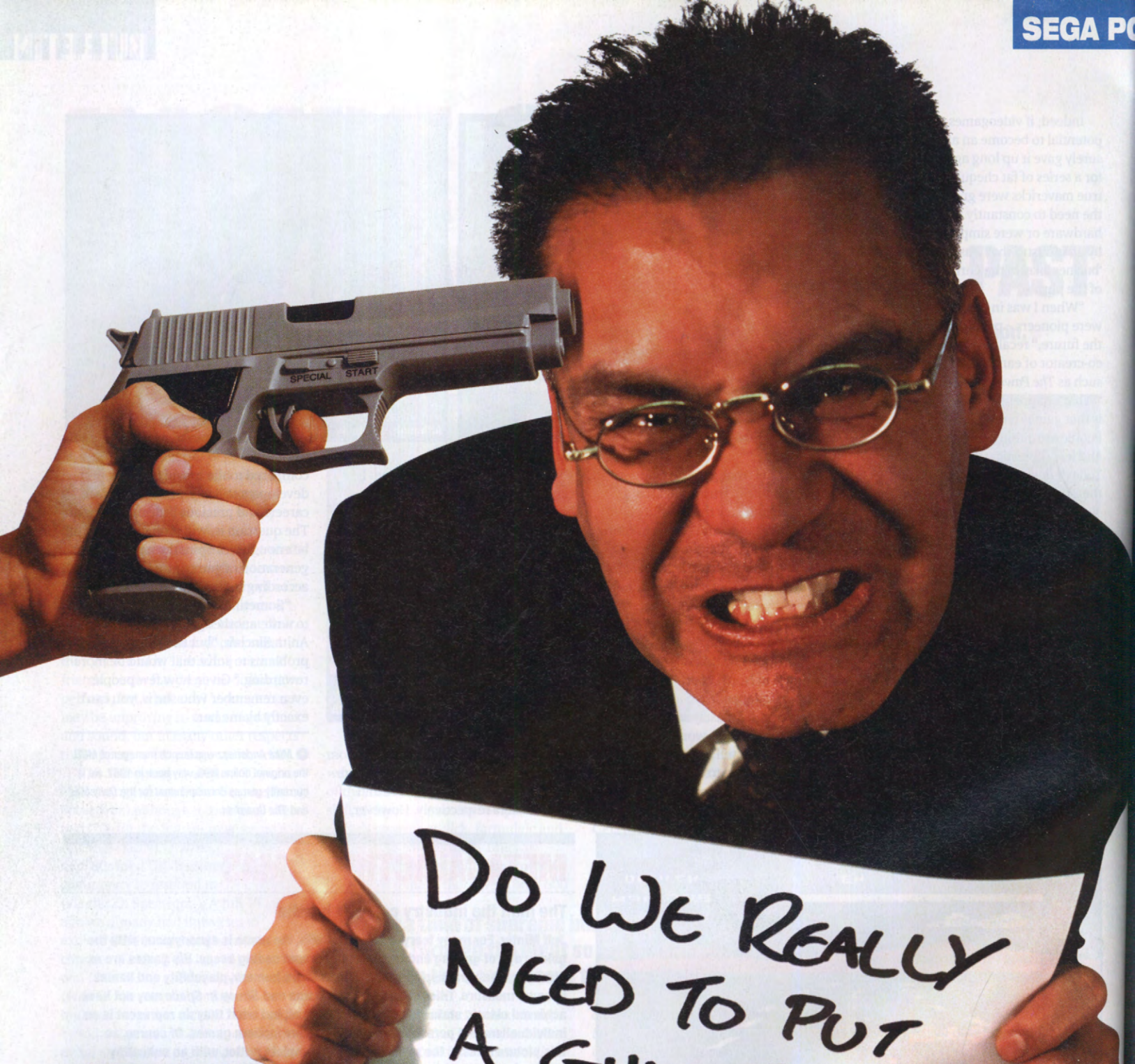
20-odd years on the wonder remains, but where is the novelty?

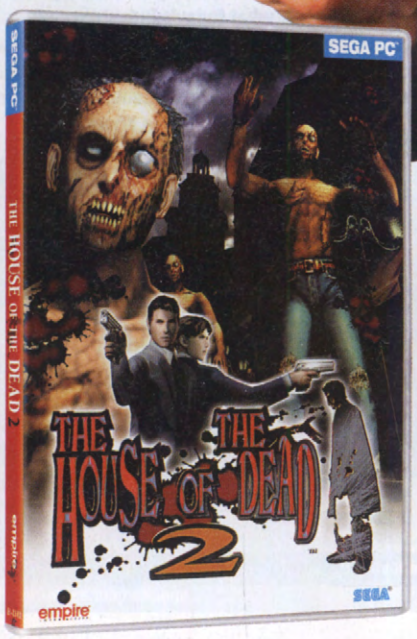
METAGALACTIC LLAMAS

The man the industry couldn't handle

Jeff Minter. For many teary-eyed retro buffs, the name is synonymous with the golden age of gaming and the British bedroom coding scene. His games are as bizarre as they are inspired, featuring obscure humour, playability and llamas in equal measure. Titles such as *Mama Llama* and *Sheep In Space* may not have achieved classic status in most people's eyes, but what they do represent is an individualism and personality lacking in many modern games. Of course, as this picture attests, the man is clearly a complete nutter, with an unhealthy affinity for woolly animals, but maybe this is just what today's industry needs to stir it out of its conservative, profit-motivated simple-mindedness. Unfortunately, there is no place for a unique personality such as Jeff in the big business of 21st-century game development, so Jeff codes on alone, making retro-styled games for an obscure set-top box that nobody cares about.


Jeff Minter: put out to pasture... and loving it.





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WAITING TO HAPPEN

Richie Shoemaker **goes back to his schooldays and wonders why no one's made a game based on them yet**

COMMAND & CONKERS

When you reach a certain age, you apparently come to realise that the years spent at school were some of the best in your life, perhaps even *the* best. That being the case, those spending the summer months assessing careers options would be well advised to take a permanent job as a live target down the local gun club because those beatings behind the bike shed, the humiliation of being turned down by the ugliest kid in school and the indignity of coming last in your third year maths exam, well it really doesn't get any better. Whether or not that is the case depends largely of course on what you make of your lives after leaving the blazer and tie behind. Work in McDonalds for a couple of years, become a marketing executive or start a thriving career as an animal porn fluffer and you may as well end things rather than go on punishing those you love, but for most of us there's plenty to look forward – or back – to.



Richie Shoemaker, age 15.

One aspect of school life – or rather after-school life – that certainly was better back in the day were the computer games we played. Technically prehistoric compared to today's space-age titles, 8-bit games were by design and necessity a much simpler form of entertainment, conversely based upon a far wider variety of themes than we see these days. On the subject of school for instance, how many games can you think of where a place of learning is the main setting? None I'll wager. However, because I'm a know-it-all-girly-girly-swot, I can think of one, *Klass Of '99*, a fairly recent zero-budget remake of an old Spectrum game that went by the name *Skooldaze*.

Now I'm not saying a full-on commercial update of that ancient classic should be undertaken, but how about a game set within a school? Before you laugh me to the headmaster's office, be honest with yourself, it sounds like it could be fun. The amusement park has been done to death, so too have cities, railroad networks and ancient civilisations. So why not try a theme that's a little bit different, something that captures the spirit of something like the original *Theme Park* or *Theme Hospital*? A game where the aim isn't so much about spending taxpayers' money wisely or topping the schools league table, but simply one where the aim is to get through the week with a full complement of teachers. It's a great idea I tell ya.

"Missing lessons, having fights and smearing dog shit over the teachers' cars are just some of the things your pupils may get up to"

OK, here's the rub. Set in a more innocent age, you are the headmaster – or mistress – of a small village school. You must hire teachers and other staff and ensure that the kids get through their education and fulfil their potential and hopefully get some decent exam results. The kids of course have other ideas. Missing lessons, having fights, causing explosions in the science labs and smearing dog shit over the teachers' cars are just some of the things your pupils may get up to. By controlling the teachers in a *Command & Conquer*-style fashion, you must make sure the kids go to their lessons, stay there and behave. Of course the odd window will end up smashed, text books thrown and sick notes counterfeited, but if you can keep your teachers happy, and to some degree the pupils, until the end of term, then perhaps you may be promoted to a bigger school. Cue level two... and so on. It's *Sheep* meets *Lemmings* meets *Total Annihilation* and it's going to be huge.

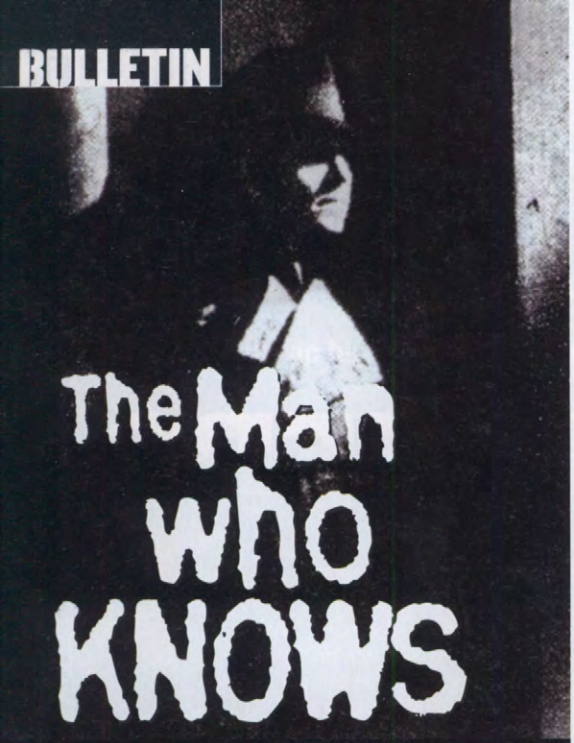
Of course it will never happen. For one thing my *Theme School* idea is far too British for it to be a hit. If the teachers were armed and the kids dosed up to the eyeballs on Angel Dust, then it might sell a few copies. Still, I live in hope. Now where did I put the number for Midas Interactive... PZ



Klass Of '99 **– keeping the dream alive, baby.**



Sim School**, now there's an idea...**



GAMES WITHOUT FRONTIERS

Convicted criminals are living in a sick dreamworld of sexual desire, death, and destruction, thanks to the open availability of virtual reality computer games in British jails. It has been revealed that playing videogames is commonplace within the penal service, and online games retailer SoftwareFirst has even released details of the top ten games ordered by HM Prisons over the last year. It is predictably headed by the various incarnations of *Tomb Raider*, swiftly followed by sundry *Resident Evils*, and also includes titles such as *Carmageddon* and *Grand Theft Auto*. Managing director of SoftwareFirst, William Flatau, laughed: "Although a tiny percentage of our overall business is to the UK's prisons, we do feel that the most popular titles ordered does present an interesting moral dilemma. As adults, our customers are free to choose whatever games they like, but do we really want inmates playing games with such graphical imagery as *Resident Evil*, or titles featuring car thefts and shoot-outs like the *Grand Theft Auto* series? However, it is interesting to note that Lara Croft's grip over the nation extends to those in prison. Let's hope they're not drawing inspiration from Lara, and attempt daring escapes like she does." Indeed. Although, more importantly, what are murderers and rapists doing playing kids' games when they should be slopping out, working in the greenhouse and smoking poor quality cigarettes. What is it? A bleeding holiday camp?

Still with *Tomb Raider*, it has been revealed that experts are currently working on the ride of the film of the game. Due to open in 2002 at Paramount Studio's Kings Island theme park in Cincinnati, Ohio, Tomb Raider: The Ride is intended to recapture the excitement of the film. Shouldn't be too difficult.

David Beckham's constantly changing hairstyle has created a unique problem for boffins working on a new game based around the England and Manchester United star. Liverpool-based Rage Software is developing *David Beckham Soccer*, and progress has been thrown into turmoil by his latest mohican style, which is almost certain to be modified in the near future. Concerned the game would look out of date, Rage has revealed it is considering the idea of releasing a patch that will update his barnet as and when necessary. World gone mad.

Still with football, and EA Sports recently united a devastating array of talent, past and present, to help publicise its forthcoming *FIFA 2002*. The cornucopia of stars included World Cup winners Alan Ball and Lothar Matthäus, Chester City and Liverpool legend Ian Rush, his former Anfield teammates, Mark Lawrenson and Craig Johnston, and Spain and Real Madrid goalie, Iker Casillas. The players put a bunch of sweating journos through their paces at France's Centre Of Excellence outside Paris, and the UK contingent later joined them for a gala dinner presided hosted by former Southampton supremo, Lawrie McMenemy. Where everyone was on their best behaviour. Now, if you believe that…

MISSING IN ACTION

These games are MIA. We make like Chuck Norris and track them down

NECROCIDE: THE DEAD MUST DIE

Novalogic • www.necrocide.com

Only two issues after we previewed it here in the pages of *ZONE*, gothic first-person shooter *Necrocide: The Dead Must Die* has been put on ice by Novalogic. The team responsible for the undead title have been pulled from the project and set to work on *Comanche 4* (see page 24). Originally slated for a spring 2001 release, the official word on *Necrocide* is now February 2002, although we suspect the project may be in serious danger of being canned. Novalogic claims the delay was imposed to give the team time to fine tune the game, but rumours that all the screenshots seen so far were mocked up suggests a far grimmer state of affairs.



Necrocide: delayed at least six months, probably more.

CRIMSON ORDER

MIA

Last seen in *ZONE* #99, this third-person tactical action game is now in limbo following the closure of Texas-based developer Kinesoft. Its other project, a beardy RTS called *MageLords*, has suffered a similar fate. The closure follows a messy dispute with publisher/distributor Softbank, and Kinesoft is now looking around for a buyer for its unfinished projects. Even though few screenshots had been released, *Crimson Order* was looking quite promising when we last spied it, taking a lead from classic strategy game *XCOM: Apocalypse*, and it would be a shame to see it fall by the wayside. We'll let you know if and when someone picks it up.



One of two former Kinesoft projects looking for a home.

WORLD SPORTS CARS

Empire Interactive • www.west-racing.com

Remember this one? This incredibly detailed and ambitious racer promised to bring a whole new level of realism to the genre, with all the track-side action included alongside the meticulously modelled driving mechanics. It was looking great when we saw it about a year ago, and was apparently on course for a late 2000 release. The latest word from publisher Empire Interactive is that *World Sports Cars* has now officially slipped until at least May next year. And that's only the official date… Of course, when you have a company like West Racing, comprising a total development team of two, delays are only to be expected. But still, 18 months…



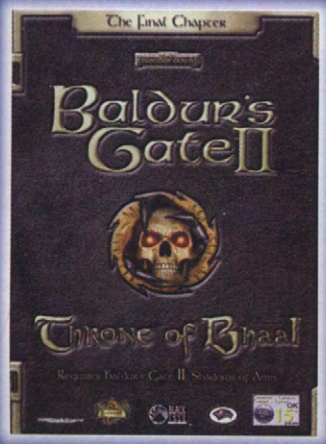
Could still redefine the racing genre, but when?

TICKER TAPE

STARTS++ Speculation is rife, not least on *PC ZONE*'s own website, that *Quake 4* is in development, and is set to be announced at QuakeCon on August 10. The word is the game is not being made at id, where all hands are busy with *Doom 3*, but has been in production at a high-profile, third-party development house for the last six months. Keep your eyes on www.pczone.co.uk for news as it breaks. ++STOP++ Speculation is also rife that Ion Storm Dallas (home of the ill-fated *Daikatana*) is set to close and that Warren Spector's Austin branch is going to split off and rename itself Manifesto Games. Jon Romero is known to have registered two new company names, possibly in anticipation of the closure. ++STOP++ *Dragon's Lair 3D* will be unveiled at the Classic Gaming Expo in Las Vegas on August 11, giving the public its first glimpse of this remake of the barely interactive laserdisc classic. ++STOP++ French developer Arxel Tribe is attempting to bring big screen serial killer Hannibal Lecter to the PC with its new horror-themed 3D action adventure. Scheduled for an end of year release, the game will follow the plot of *Hannibal* quite closely, and puts you in the role of FBI agent Clarice Starling.++STOP++ In an impressive show of community support, Black Isle has launched a new expansion pack for *Icewind Dale: Heart Of Winter* called *Trials Of The Luremaster*. Featuring 20 new maps, new items and monsters, the 71.3Mb download is available free at www.fileplanet.com, or for those without obscene bandwidth, we'll chuck it on our cover CDs next issue. ++ENDS++

HMV

seriously addictive...



Baldur's Gate™ II - Throne Of Bhaal™

Throne Of Bhaal™ is the expansion pack to the ever popular *Baldur's Gate*™ *2: Shadows Of Amn*, and the final chapter of the epic *Baldur's Gate*™ series. Featuring 10 new spells including Bigby's Crushing Hand, Forceful Hand and Clenched Fist, plus 15 new monsters including Vampiric Mindflayer, Elemental Lich and Undead Beholder. *Throne Of Bhaal*™ is an essential conclusion and fitting end to the *Baldur's Gate*™ series.

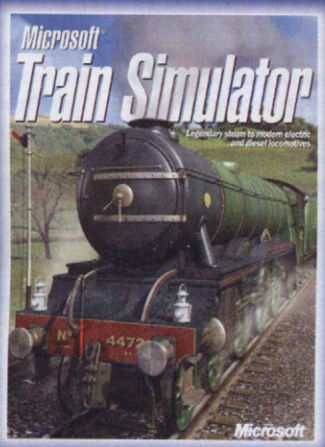
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Pick your team from any of the test playing nations or from the two division county championship and play in all the domestic tournaments including the National League and Super Cup. Featuring historical scenarios from great games of the past, the latest statistical database of almost every player in First Class cricket, an on-line league where you can match your skills against other players, plus commentary by the BBC's legendary Jonathan Agnew.

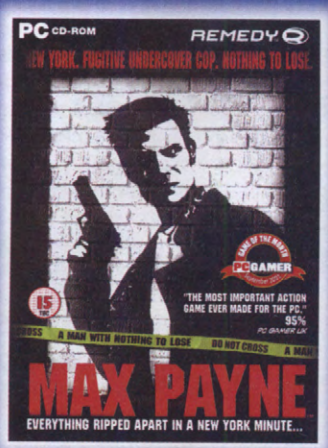
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MAILBOX



Got something to say to us? Nice, nasty or otherwise, get it off your chest and if it's interesting enough we'll print it

ANSWERED BY Dave Woods

CONTACT INFO

Write to us, and if your letter is selected as Letter Of The Month we'll send you a prize.

WRITE TO Mailbox, *PC ZONE*, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1P 5FF

EMAIL letters.pczone@dennis.co.uk

CHAT FORUM If you've got something pressing to say, check out the 'lively' chat forum on our website. Point your browser at **www.pczone.co.uk** for further info.

SUPER PRIZES TO BE WON



***PC ZONE* is giving away not one, but two of these wonderful GameVoice contraptions from Microsoft to the writer of the Star Letter. If we don't consider any of the letters to be worthy we'll just keep them for ourselves. Using the GameVoice, you can communicate with other players online and give yourself a massive advantage over the Luddites who have to stop and type instructions. They're priced at £49.99 each and are worth every single penny.**

TIGHTWAD

I've been buying *PCZONE* for a while now – a few years at least – and I'm becoming increasingly annoyed by the number of gamers writing in and moaning about the recommended retail price of computer games that you advertise in your reviews (*Serious Sam* in particular). With virtual shops on the Internet virtually bankrupting themselves to get you to buy from their sites, why would anyone pay the RRP for a game? These people probably enjoy paying £14.99 for Lionel Ritchie's new album, and probably buy their baked beans from Marks & Spencer.

I bought *Serious Sam* and *Tropico* for 30 quid a few weeks ago on the Internet, half the combined RRP price. Some people may call me a radical, but I prefer to spend as little of my hard-earned cash on a game as possible. I've heard of people having problems with getting products from Internet sites, but a few quid saved is still a few quid saved, even if your game arrives a bit late. I'm no Internet pioneer, but it pays to surf the web for cheap deals. If people desert the high street for goods then prices will have to fall. Take my advice: buy from the Internet and help save ailing websites – or it'll be your money that Mr Branson will be spending on his next big ballooning adventure.

Richard Saunders

And you wouldn't want that on your conscience would you?



***Serious Sam*, seriously cheap – if you shop around.**

NEW BOY

Just one quick question: did new boy Anthony Holden previously work for the *Daily Mail* as a book reviewer or something like that? I saw his name on the back of a book recently with a quote.

Shane O'Leary

We asked him, but he's denying all knowledge of the *Daily Mail*. But then you would wouldn't you?

> **"I've heard of people having problems with getting products from Internet sites, but a few quid saved is still a few quid saved"**
>
> **RICHARD SAUNDERS, HE'S WELL STINGY**

SHOOT 'EM UP

Steve Hill's comments about games being wrongly blamed for the violence in US society brought about an interesting response from Ian Chisholm (Letter Of The Month, issue 105). He agrees that it's ridiculous to blame games, but can't see that it's logical to blame guns. He goes on to say that he owns firearms, shoots them for sport and respects them. Whoopee-do.

Now I don't mean to be insulting, but isn't that view a bit short-sighted? Steve Hill wasn't saying that a gun will immediately turn a sane person into a gun-toting maniac. The fact that Ian Chisholm is responsible with his toys doesn't mean that everyone else is. In this country we have tight restrictions on guns and the net result is that we don't have a load of maniacs marauding around the country shooting up innocents.

In America it's easy for anyone to get a gun, which means that a lot of nutters end up with lethal weapons. It doesn't take much to work out that a nutter with a gun is likely to do someone damage.

PREZZER'S PAP

And the winner is...

A couple of months back we offered you the unique opportunity to bid for Paul Presley's entire back catalogue of astonishingly old games, with the proceeds going to a charity of your choice. The response was amazing, and after a frenzied bidding war, Chris Clinton came out tops with a massive bid of £260. So, Oxfam gets a big cheque, Chris gets a load of old games on 5.25in floppy disks (how exciting is that?) and Prezzer's new lady friend need never know about his geeky past – so don't mention it to anyone, ever. Everyone's a winner.





This isn't Dave Woods. It just looks like him. Honest.

If you've got a million nutters with a million guns then someone is going to get killed.

So, although I agree that the gun itself isn't to blame, and that people are the real problem, surely the only way round this is to impose the toughest restrictions possible.

"In this country we have restrictions on guns and the result is that we don't have a load of maniacs shooting up innocents"

ADE NEWELL ON BAD PEOPLE WITH GUNS

And, wouldn't it be better to cut out any risk and ban guns outright. OK, Ian might not get his cheap kicks, but if it saved one life then surely that's a sacrifice he'd be willing to make?

Ade Newell

You'd have to ask him yourself. But be careful, I hear he's armed.

SEXY PANTS

Just what does your esteemed editor get up to in his spare time? I found this photo on the Internet and it is, without a shadow of a doubt, Dave Woods. If you didn't see the story, it was supposedly about a couple that had split up and the woman posted these shots of her boyfriend on the Internet to get back at him. *The Sun* printed the story, but it turned out to be a hoax. Regardless, the fact remains that Dave Woods dresses in ladies' underwear and here's the proof.

Jeremy Shott

Would you believe me if I said that it wasn't me? Although you must admit I cut quite a dashing figure...

THEME VIRUS

Over the past few months I've looked at the new games being released but none of them compare to the sheer excellence of *Counter-Strike* in terms of network play. I feel, as a hardcore gamer, that I should provide people with an alternative genre of game to while away the hours of spare time we've all got. So I thought I would run an idea past your superior gaming minds at *PCZONE* to see what you think. Here's the idea...

Each player gets a virus construction set and ten minutes on the clock to construct their masterpiece. The viruses are then transferred onto each other's computers (ideal for a home LAN game for two people). The viruses are then marked out of ten by the players according to how much damage they cause. You get 0 points for a no-effect virus, up to three points for bypassing a firewall, four points for deleting required windows files, and so on, up to eight points if the system can only boot into safe mode, nine points for formatting the hard disk, and finally... ten points for flashing the motherboard.

I think that this game could be the next big thing for online gamers around the world. But I haven't yet thought of an appropriate title for it. I wondered if you might have any suggestions?

Dominic Wells

Umm... try to get out more?



The flap is dead.

FILTHY FLAPS

PC ZONE's issue 105 saw a welcome return to form. Ever since issue 101 you have made me suffer with your cruel 'flap' gimmick. If I wanted a magazine with flaps I'd look up to the top shelf, buy it and leave the store with a very red head. Flaps entice different finger movements and my games of *Unreal Tournament* – usually quick, fantastic shooting sessions – have suffered as a result. Please assure me that the flap won't make a return. That way, a sad git like me can enjoy game-playing and forget the fact that I haven't had it for so long that a copy of *Erotica Island* almost sounds like a good time.

Jerry Burgess

Don't worry. You've seen the last of our flaps.



Ban this sick filth now.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

GOODIES WINNER!

WE WANT TO BE FREE

I'm writing to provide you with an alternative view of how games should progress in the future. For the past year or so you've been criticising games for being linear, and citing the fact that with today's technology games should be more open-ended, providing you with the freedom to go where you want and do what you want. But when I play a game I want to be entertained, and for this to happen the action has to be paced evenly throughout. As far as I can see the only way to do this is to push the player through a series of events that the developers can control.

I bought *Operation Flashpoint* recently and this seems to be a game that's taken your point of view to heart. Instead of pushing you through levels, you seem to have the freedom to travel anywhere and do anything. The only thing this does for me is dilute the gaming experience. Why in hell would I want to pay £30 for a game where I can get in a Skoda and drive 30 or so miles without seeing anyone? The fact that you can do this seems completely irrelevant to me. It's just a waste of time, and as soon as you realise this you go looking for the mission proper. A linear game would cut through this superfluous bump and take you straight to the action.

You could extend this analogy to the film industry. There was loads of talk over the past decade of interactive films, with multiple endings and alternate camera angles. This hasn't materialised and why? Directors like Spielberg and Scorsese have the vision to produce a masterpiece – we don't, or else we'd be behind the cameras. The moral of the story? Be careful what you wish for, *PC ZONE*, it might come true.

Dave Spiller



Do you want to be free to do what you want?

I take your point – linear games still have their place, take *Mr Driller* for example. But to work these games need proper pacing and narrative, to disguise the fact that you're effectively on a conveyor belt. Don't give up on free-form gaming – as a concept, it's still relatively new. Games like *Deus Ex* show that with the right blokes behind the code, freedom in games can be a wonderful thing.



ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

In the blood-splattered corner, weighing in at 450lbs and with a fetish for collecting human skulls... A Predator. In the pitch-black corner, weighing in at two tons, with a penchant for ripping out people's intestines... An Alien Queen. Running away quickly in the opposite direction... A *Martin Korda*

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Monolith Productions
PUBLISHER Vivendi
WEBSITE www.lith.com
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Late 2001

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's got Aliens and Predators in it
- Enhanced LithTech 2.5 engine
- Separate campaign and storyline for each race
- Huge array of weaponry and gadgets
- Improved lighting, sound and AI
- Loads of new multiplayer options

Be honest, how many really crap film sequels have you seen in your life? Now this is only going to work if you're ruthlessly truthful, which means (and I hate to have to break this to you), including the likes of *Karate Kid 2*. Close one I know, but it's gotta go on that list, sorry. Anyway, take your time. No hurry. In fact, while you're having a think, here's a reminder of a couple that bear more than a passing relevance to this preview. For starters, how about *Predator 2*? What the hell was that all about? Following on from the non-stop action of its predecessor, which brilliantly cast a group of ultra-fit commandos against a seemingly invincible alien warrior in the claustrophobic and humid jungle, came... Danny Glover. For the majority of the film, Mr 'I'm too old for this shit' Glover looks like he's about to keel over and die from excessive sweating, even when faced with a relatively untaxing task. Like getting out of a chair. *Alien 3* wasn't much better, providing us with about as many thrills as an afternoon visit to an incontinent auntie and engaging in a three-hour conversation about crochet.

Hopefully by now you've come up with enough films to justify my incredibly sweeping statement



about sequels generally being rubbish. As with the *Predator* and *Alien* films, it's obvious that not even the near irresistible lure of brain-eating, rabid creatures with acid for blood and hugely powerful and technologically enhanced aliens can guarantee success. And, of course, the same can apply for games. However, before you start panicking that the follow-up to one of the finest FPSs of all time is going to turn out to be a turd the size of Bognor Regis, let me put your mind at rest. *AvP2* definitely won't be falling into the same pit of mediocrity inhabited by its celluloid counterparts, because it's looking incredible. No, actually I lied, it's looking nothing short of stunning.

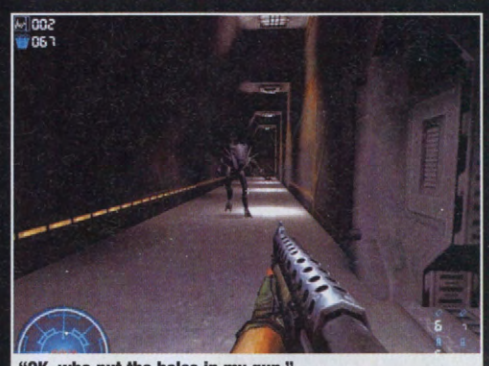
The reason I'm being so cocksure about this game is because I got to play it first hand (smiles smugly, gets kicked in by reader lynch mob). From the moment you enter the first level, it's obvious how much work has gone into the three character types, which are as dynamic and exciting as they are varied. You're immediately struck by an atmosphere of unseen fear and rising tension – created by all-new subtle audio tricks and masterfully erratic lighting effects – which take the FPS genre to new psychologically scarring heights. In fact *AvP2* is so terrifying that it will no doubt lead to months of intense therapy sessions for scores of fat insecure American teenagers – and a few hundred moistened Mrs Tiggywinkle pyjama bottoms for soft boys the world over. Be warned now, *AvP2* won't be for you if you're the kind of person who cries when they see a wounded bird with no beak lying in the road having its brains strained out of its ears by a passing lorry. You'll need iron balls (or the female equivalent) if you're going to survive this horror fest.



Dark, blood-stained teeth? Try new Arm and Hammer Whitening.



"Just die will you."



"OK, who put the holes in my gun."

HERE'S THE INTERVIEW PART

As well as playtesting the latest build of the game (for the lowdown on the multiplayer side of things, check out the Multiplying The Carnage panel), we also caught up with the team from Fox Interactive. We grilled David Stalker, the producer, about what we can expect in the finished product and the exclusive demo we'll be running in *PC ZONE* (hopefully next month). We even managed to get some info out of him about a possible *AvP* film.

Another *PCZ* exclusive perhaps? Well, it would have been if he'd actually said anything conclusive. Anyway, here's what he had to say for himself...

How do you think you've improved on the original game?

We started *AvP2* by carefully looking at the things we dug in *AvP1*, then looking at what we didn't like, then what we thought would've been cool but didn't make it. When we discussed this stuff with Monolith, they clearly had a lot of similar thoughts as well as their own whole fresh perspective that we knew would bring a lot of energy to the game. So we definitely see this game building on the first.

The LithTech engine technology allowed us to create much more detailed worlds (including some gorgeous exteriors) and characters than before, which is really great when it comes to depicting such well-known movie monsters. Trying to create the feeling that you were in an *Aliens/Predator* movie was one of the major goals.

There's also more subtle stuff, like how the game draws you in, growing more challenging in a gradual way rather than just dumping you in at the deep end (which, admittedly, the first kind of did).

Then there's the story. *AvP1* relied mostly on the atmosphere of its locations and your previous acquaintance with the universe. This time we have a story of our own, which will really help the player get into their character (and their species). We're using in-game cinematics to help communicate this story –



One, two, cha cha cha. Three, four, cha cha cha.



I'm afraid it's going to be glasses for you Mr Jones.



Remember kids: never swallow boomerangs.

the FMV budget for the kind of stuff we're doing with the engine would've made it totally impossible.

There was no storyline in the original game. Will there be a storyline in this sequel and if so, what will the plot be?

Whaddya mean there was no storyline? It was there – you just had to look really hard for it and use your imagination... a lot. *AvP2* is definitely much, much stronger in the storytelling department.

The story takes place on the planet bearing the designation LV-1201. Events transpire which bring all three species together during one six-week period, with everyone fighting for survival.

Recently, LV-1201 was discovered to be home to an Alien hive of indeterminate age, as well as to ancient structures clearly belonging to some *other* extraterrestrial species. A gigantic expedition, led by Dr Arnaud Eisenberg (lone survivor of an earlier expedition) is sent to study the Xenomorphs, the hive and the mysterious structures.

At some point, things go awry and a passing Marine destroyer is diverted to investigate what happened to the expedition. Unbeknown to the humans, LV-1201 is periodically visited by Predators (what with the ready supply of Aliens for game) but, upon arrival at their familiar hunting grounds, they are incensed to find humans there as well. All three species are on a collision course with each other.

Having selected which species to play, the player will play through a complete story of connected 'missions' as that species. However, the story will only become fully clear as they play the other two species and see that there are three intersecting stories and that only by playing all three can they fully grasp what happened on LV-1201.

"*AvP2* is so terrifying that it will no doubt lead to months of intense therapy sessions for scores of fat insecure American teenagers"

***AvP* was famed for its use of lighting. How is the new Lithtech engine improving on this?**

Monolith has been hard at work on their lighting models to make *AvP2* even more impressive than *AvP1*. This includes 32-bit animated light-mapping and dynamic light sources to make for some great effects – like shadows cast by lights behind fans and light spilling out of doorways as they open. Let's not forget all of the different vision modes the different species have that render the world in different lighting conditions. You've also got muzzle flashes, explosions, shoulder lamps, flares... is that enough lighting for you?

Not bad, not bad at all. How many weapons are going to feature for each of the three sides and what are they? Do any of them have a dual fire mode?

Many weapons have a dual fire mode. The Predator has modified versions of his equipment from *AvP1*

MULTIPLYING THE CARNAGE

Yeah, yeah, yeah, but what's it like in multiplayer?

While it's always fun to blow away hordes of alien scum, it's even more fun to shoot hordes of your friends instead. I was lucky enough to spend around an hour trying out the multiplayer side of the game.

The first level was a massive open arena with buildings towering in the night sky all around me. As an alien I traversed one of the walls, camouflaging myself in the darkness before pouncing on an unsuspecting developer who yelped like a three-year-old girl who's just found a dead rat, as I rearranged his internal organs. But before smugness could set in, another adversary picked me off from a distance with the Predator's devastating shoulder-mounted laser.

The next level I tried out was set in a science lab, with a huge balcony looking down on the level. Playing in this more confined space, the gameplay wasn't too dissimilar to *Unreal Tournament*, only infinitely more terrifying. Because the action is fast (but not ridiculously so like in *Quake III*) you have time to think of how to use the environment and your character's strengths to your advantage. Using the alien to dodge bullets by running onto walls and ceilings may be disorientating at first, but once you master it, it's a deadly skill. And it's this kind of innovation which makes the multiplayer games in *AvP2* stand out from its rivals. As an alien I hid in high corners and waited for my prey to pass under me. However, as a commando, I found that staying in open areas was the best way to play, in order to make the most of my massive arsenal of weapons without the threat of being ambushed. Finally, I gave the Predator a whirl, but he proved to be the least complete (in terms of programming, not ability) character of the three. However, I still got to pummel someone's head in and pull off a couple of fantastic (if hugely flukey) shots, so I was pretty satisfied with what I'd seen of him.

From the 60 all-too-brief minutes I spent playing the multiplayer game, it's clear *AvP2* is going to be a cracker – in fact it could have the most versatile and original multiplayer action ever to grace a FPS. In order to get a clearer idea of what to expect from the multiplayer games in the finished version, I had another brief chat with the lads at Fox, who revealed the following...

Will you be able to create your own deathmatch levels and if so, how?
One of the nicest things about LithTech games is that players are usually able to get their hands on the actual game creation tools fairly soon after the game comes out.

What other multiplayer game types will there be?
We're planning around 12 maps (with, we hope, many more on the way) with a variety of play modes, including: Deathmatch, Team (Species) Deathmatch, Hunt (a tag game similar to the one in *AvP1*) and a couple of others with saucy names like Overrun that are still being worked on. You will be able to choose from a large number of different player characters and these can impact what you can do in the game.

Are there going to be bots you can play against without going online?
Right now this is beyond our reach, so it will not be in the shipping product. However, with a game available online for continuing play, I like to think there are always possibilities of later additions to do this stuff in the future.

Will there be co-operative play against the computer?
There won't be any co-operative play against AIs at release in the single-player or multiplayer maps. Trying to get multiple players through levels designed for a detailed single-player story was not possible at this time.



"Game over man, game over."

plus he has some new items such as the much-requested Net Gun and the Combi-Stick (the telescoping spear). The Net Gun is great (especially in multiplayer) because it bundles the victim up in this big net, allowing you to close in for the kill. The Combi-Stick allows you to do close-up damage, similar to the Wristblades but with greater reach.

Similar to the Predator, the Marine has almost everything from *AvP1* but improved and upgraded. Some of the weapons we've added are a knife (think about it: Net Gun, knife), a pistol and a shotgun. We've also added the functioning shoulder lamp, a Welder and the ComTech (or 'Hacking') Device. The Welder lets you open certain doorways and ducting (remember to seal them behind you) and the ComTech Device is the little tricorder-style thing Hudson uses to run a bypass and open the big door in *Aliens*.

With the Alien, we wanted to try and keep it as intuitive as possible and not twist the character so that it suddenly stopped feeling like an Alien. So you still have the jaw, claw and tail, but we've refined what's there and added some more control options (such as allowing you to toggle wall-walking on or off). We're also giving the Alien a really great pouncing ability that can be useful for both attacking and navigation.

AI is the Holy Grail in first-person shooters at the moment. What advances have you made with *AvP2* and how have you adapted the AI to suit the three distinctly different species in the game?
Our main focus has been to make sure that the species feel real and yet intuitive.

"Aliens will ram doors, and if they're pissed off enough, can actually bust through and get you"

On the 'real' front, we focus on the AI's senses. If an AI can cheat all the time and you can never trick it, then it isn't going to be much fun. Our AIs really 'see' and 'hear' their enemies and allies. Lighting, distance, field of view, cloaking, sound volume (and more) all affect the senses. This has gone a long way in providing a sense of life to our AIs. And by the way, they will fight their enemies as well as fighting you.

CV — MONOLITH

MONOLITH CV

When it comes to the FPS, Monolith Productions is one of the most experienced developers around. And here's why...

1997 Although *Blood* used the durable *Duke Nukem* engine and was full of intelligent AI, it failed to compete with the likes of *Quake*.

1998 After feverishly working on a brand new 3D engine for 18 months, Monolith knocked out two fantastic FPSs in quick succession – *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division* and *Blood II*. Of course, they were both buggered as *Half-Life* had appeared just a month before either of them.

2000 We didn't think *No One Lives Forever* was brilliant. But many of you did. Running on the all new LithTech 2.5 engine, it cast you as a spy who has to save the world. Despite the wide array of gadgets at your disposal, *No One Lives Forever* had poor AI and proved far too linear for our liking. So there.

Perfect senses aren't enough, though. If you can't tell what the AI's intentions are, we might as well not bother. So the inhabitants of *AvP2* talk and move when they get suspicious, run and hide when they're afraid, call for help when they're overwhelmed, or just cry like a baby and hope not to die.

Is the Alien Queen going to make an appearance in the game?
Yes *they* will.

Will you be able to play as any of the different types of Aliens, eg will you be able to play as the Queen or a facehugger?
Wow, what a good idea. But no, you won't.

Maybe next time round eh? Anyway, how about the acid from the Aliens? Will it burn through floors or your head?
You will see acid damage existing in the environment (including the ever-lovely melted floors) and acid from wounded Aliens will damage you and damage the surroundings somewhat.

Will there be team orders and teamwork?
The game isn't designed to be a squad-style game but the player *will* find themselves interacting with and being helped out by AI characters at points.

What new technology that hasn't been seen before in either the last game or the films will be on show here?
At some points, the Marine will get to use an Exo-Suit, which is a militarised Powerloader with weapons.

What other first-person shooters do you admire/have taken inspiration from?
I like the ones with story and atmosphere, and obviously there have been a few of these recently: for example *Half-Life*, *Undying* and *Deus Ex*.

We saw at E3 that the Aliens can smash through doors. What other new things will they be able to do?
As you mentioned, Aliens will actually ram doors and will dent them repeatedly. And, if they're pissed off enough, they can actually bust through and get you. They can also do the same thing with floor gratings. You can walk over a floor grate and it gets buckled as an Alien below tries to get at you through it.



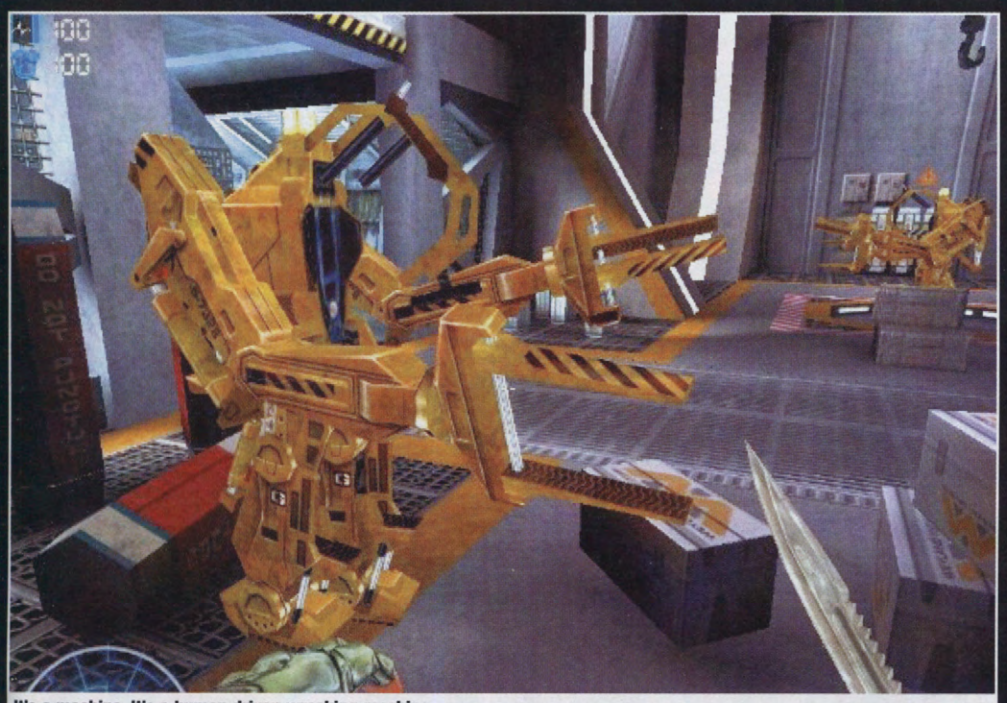
"I'm Billy and this is my friend Oscar. We both work in IT."



Play as an Alien, Predator or Marine.



"Are you thinking what I'm thinking."



It's a machine. It's a human driven wrecking machine.

Sounds scary... What new sound techniques have you used to heighten the atmosphere?
The biggest thing that's been added has been a specially adapted version of Direct Music to create a soundtrack that both fits in with the movies and the previous game but is also context-sensitive to what's going on around the player at the time. The goal is to give players a much more visceral response to situations they encounter since, after many years of movies and TV, we're all attuned to what soundtracks tell us is *about* to happen.

Can you tell us about all the different types of Aliens that will be in the game, and what their roles will be?
There will be some Aliens of slightly different physical shapes and abilities, usually based on which species they were hosted in. This plays out as different speed, strength, resilience and so on.

With the success of the *AVP* games, what do you think is the likelihood of there being an *AvP* film?
I think it's safe to say that (as far as I know), it's being seriously considered. I think it's got a better chance of happening now than it's ever had before.

I think with the standards and the success of the games we've done, we've been able to demonstrate to the chaps in feature production that bringing the two together can actually be done without being cheesy, and that moreover, it can be scary and thrilling.

How many missions does each side have in the single-player campaign?
There are seven missions in each species' storyline. Obviously, each campaign isn't as big as a single dedicated game would be because that would take triple the time to get done. We look at this as being one nicely proportioned game with three incredibly cool characters that you get to play (with all that entails, including completely different weapons, tools, physical abilities and styles of gameplay).

What can our readers expect to see in the exclusive playable demo we'll be running on a future CD?
We're releasing a single-player demo to give a sense of how that experience is going to play, and then we're looking at releasing a multiplayer demo later as well so they can see that side of the game too.

What is the current shipping date for the game?
When it's done. No really, it will be out before Christmas – not sure of the exact date yet.

What plans have you got for the *AvP* licence next? Do you plan to take the Alien or Predator universe into any other genre?
My take on *AvP* is that it means the three different species in conflict with each other. The first-person games are just one expression of this three-way conflict concept. Don't be surprised if you start hearing about another game soon.

Which of the Alien and Predator films were your favourites? And what particular elements have you taken out of them and used in *AVP2*?
Aliens. That movie is clearly the jumping-off point for the *AvP* games. I love the idea of filling out the background and world around that point in the history of the movies.

I don't know about you, but after what I've seen and been told, I can't wait until the end of the year when *AvP2* hits the shelves. In fact, I've already started stocking up on man-sized Huggies and portaloos. Until then though, I'll just have to while away the time by saving injured sparrows from unobservant drivers. Gotta go now... (I'm welling up again, don't let the readers know guys)... You bastards. PZ



Keeping it real...

REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAMES

Keith Pullin has been hooked on RTS games ever since _Dune 2_ was released in 1993. That's eight years of his life wasted, and by the looks of things he's about to waste eight more

Is there a PC user on this planet who doesn't own some kind of RTS game? Confirmation of the genre's popularity came on our recent bi-annual invasion of Los Angeles where despite squinty eyes and thumping hangovers, *PC ZONE* discovered that virtually every publisher at E3 had some kind of strategy game on display.

Thankfully the standard was excellent, especially as most developers seemed to acknowledge the need for a shift towards stealth and combat-orientated gameplay rather than resource management. The whole team agreed that the wares on display showed a level of enthusiasm and originality we hadn't seen since *Age Of Empires*.

The following pages are testament to the fact that for the first time ever at an E3 show, we spent as much time gawking at strategy games as we did first-person shooters – and what's more – we bloody loved it. And there were those who were starting to think the RTS was all washed-up. Shame on you, the new breed of RTS is almost upon us...

E3 SPECIAL



"Atmospherically the whole thing was a moving experience, with the gurgling screams and groans of the dying still echoing round our heads now"

PRAETORIANS

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Pyro Studios
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE www.pyrostudios.com
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE June 2002

War, war, war. That's all they ever think about at Pyro Studios. Not content with upsetting us all with realistic re-enactments of World War II in *Commandos 1* and *2*, the boys and girls from sunny Spain are hoping to do a similar thing with the old Romans.

As you probably know by now, *Praetorians* is a strategy game along the lines of *Shogun: Total War*. Essentially it's a 3D troop-based affair focusing on army manoeuvres and tactics rather than resource management. There are a total of 16 missions which take you from the sand and pyramids of Egypt, through the boar-infested heartland of Gaul and finally into the Roman Empire itself. Ultimately, the aim of *Praetorians* is to kick the Emperor's arse and ascend to the throne where you can loaf away your days eating grapes and fornicating in hot tubs.

Political and economic machinations also play a large part in the proceedings and the player is constantly faced with decisions on how to spend their hard-earned (or rather looted) money. The most obvious way is to blow it all on new units of which there are ten military types including archers, pikemen, centurions and praetorians, as well as more passive roles such as scouts and diplomats. On the other hand you might want to think about spending a few gold coins researching new technologies and abilities in the form of fortifications and siege machines.

Despite the fact that there wasn't any working gameplay in the true sense of the word, we witnessed some pretty impressive staged scuffles around the base of a pyramid including flaming arrows arcing through the air, battering rams and the famed giant turtle attack. Atmospherically the whole thing was a moving experience, with the gurgling screams and groans of the dying still echoing around our heads now. Then again that could be the sound Martin Korda makes in the middle of the night after a few too many at the hotel bar. Anyway, you'd better watch out for it, because like all things Roman, it'll change the way you live.



***Praetorians* will favour battlefield tactics over resource management.**



Siege weapons will feature heavily.

BATTLE REALMS

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Liquid Entertainment
PUBLISHER Ubi Soft
WEBSITE www.battlerealms.com
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE September 2001

At a glance *Battle Realms* does little to inspire confidence. In fact, graphically it looks positively outdated. The stand itself didn't even have any scantily clad women for us to rest our weary eyeballs on. So, we were about to move along when suddenly a man appeared and started babbling about obscured vision.

Out of politeness (and a certain amount of empathy) we listened to his curious tale. Suddenly we found ourselves gathered around a monitor, shoving each other aside for a better look. This reversal of opinion was due to the fact that *BR* employs stealth-based gameplay very similar to *Desperados* and *Commandos*. The realistic line-of-sight engine brings elements such as reconnaissance, sneaking and ambushing into play in a way we've not seen in a traditional RTS before.

We were also intrigued by the way players have the freedom to use resources in a much more liberal way than usual. Water can be used to extinguish fires, increase the growth rate of rice and quench the thirst of peasants. Horses can be trained as warhorses or simple farm animals. In this way, nearly every resource in the game has multiple uses, and it's up to the player to discover the best way of employing them. In fact, the whole game is about choices and repercussions, and is quite similar in some respects to *Black & White*.

"Bizarre creations include sumo wrestlers with cannons wedged into the folds of their flab"

And like *B&W*, *BR* has a strong RPG focus running through it. At the start of the game players choose which one of four clans (Dragon, Serpent, Lotus or Wolf) they would like to belong to. Units then receive different upgrades depending on which clan they are part of. It's good to see some originality going into the units too, with the bizarre creations including firework-wielding chemists, werewolves, Zen archers and sumo wrestlers with cannons wedged into the folds of their flab.

Maybe we were being told a pack of lies or maybe, just maybe, there's something here that might be worth keeping an eye on. After all, a game that's a mixture of *Age Of Empires*, *Desperados* and *Black & White*, with a hint of Manga surrealism thrown in, doesn't sound too bad at all.



Who would live in a house like this? Witches maybe?



Some horses go for a swim. And they could have opted for a quiet life on a farm...



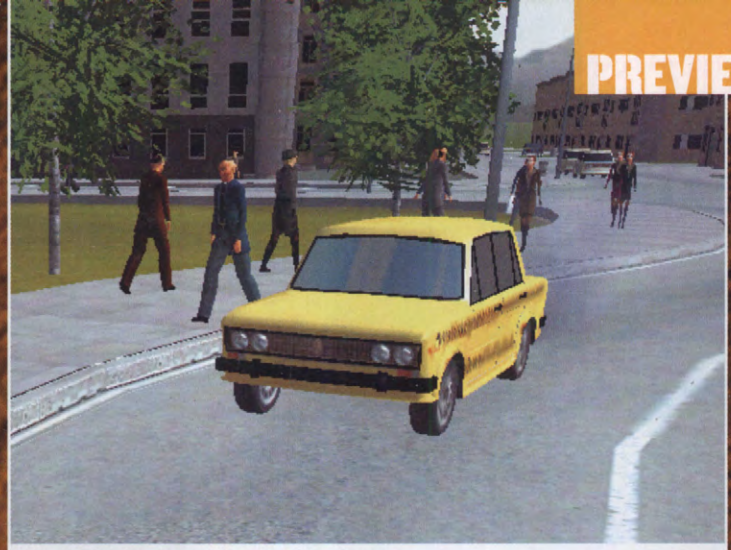
Don't be fooled by the cover – there's a lot more to this than meets the eye.



This 2D landscape looks uninteresting, but it still has plenty of line-of-sight technology.



Are you Red Fox?


I like driving in my car, it's not quite a Jaguar...

REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Elixir Studios
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE www.elixir-studios.co.uk
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Spring 2002

The more we see of *Republic* the more we like it. Starting with just one loyal follower and tiny headquarters you must stir up enough support to oust Mr President and rule the fictional Republic of Novistrana. Attempting exactly the same thing are 16 other players (human or computer controlled) who will be trying every trick in the book to get there first.

There are hundreds of thousands of citizens to manipulate in Novistrana, and all of them have their own religion, political opinion, ethnic background and job (or indeed lack of one). The demo we were gleefully sat watching showed clearly that one of the best parts of the gameplay is it actually learns to deal with these varying personalities as opposed to reacting to mass demands (one of the common criticisms of *Black & White*).

Sixteen towns, four cities and the capital make up the Republic and theoretically it's possible to control all of these by manipulating the general populace as well as important characters such as judges, police officers, army generals and bishops. Ultimately, your goal is achieved by following one of five paths, namely politics, military, business, religion and, as we could so spectacularly see for ourselves, law breaking. The graphics engine looks even more impressive than the screenshots suggest and believe us when we tell you, having seen the scope of this game first hand, it's nothing short of breathtaking. From what we were told and what we saw, there's not a lot you can't do in *Republic*. You even get to rig football matches and control our beloved media, so you can broadcast propaganda messages to the nation. Pah! As if that happens in real life...

IMPERIUM GALACTICA III

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Philos Labs
PUBLISHER CDV
WEBSITE www.imperiumgalactica.com
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Winter 2001

This third part of the *Imperium Galactica* series is another RTS that finds itself moving away from an empire/colony building concept by putting emphasis on tactical space combat instead. Bases will still be there of course, but this time round expect much more in the way of stellar research, configurable ships, customisable weapons and smooth *Homeworld*-esque dogfights.

A great deal of fuss was being made of the various formations your units can merge into. In one demo we were shown a squadron of fighters morphing into a large wedge formation, which automatically generated a force field to protect a convoy. We were told that eventually there will be plenty more of these 'intelligent' tactics to marvel at, including a formation that changes into a mobile fort. Sounds interesting.

There's a much more open feel to *IGIII* than the previous two offerings, with players choosing their missions from an amazingly rendered galactic map. Gameplay is story-driven, with lots of sub-missions and red herrings boasting both good and bad surprises. There's also a generous dollop of alien technology up for grabs as well as special 'hero' units that can be earned after completing certain missions.

Overall *IGIII* looks like an interesting mix of *Homeworld* and *Ground Control*. Though it's shaping up nicely, one possible failing could be its utter lack of multiplayer options. Oh well, you can't win 'em all...



Imperium Galactica 3 is unrecognisable from its predecessor.



Sigma will be set over 13 lush looking islands.



No animals were harmed during the making of this game.



Hitler wouldn't have stood a chance against this lot.

SIGMA: THE ADVENTURES OF REX CHANCE

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Relic
PUBLISHER Microsoft
WEBSITE www.relic.com
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Winter 2001

Sigma: The Adventures Of Rex Chance spans 15 missions played across 14 beautiful living, breathing islands. We overheard quite a few people mentioning that graphically the game is reminiscent of *Giants: Citizen Kabuto* and it was causing quite a stir on that basis alone, but that's where the similarities end.

The overall aim of this innovative RTS is to thwart the megalomaniac plans of a 1930s super-villain by pitching a veritable Noah's Ark of genetically produced warrior creatures against him. Weird? Well, you could say that, but at least it shows Relic at their imaginative best – and that's a force that cannot be ignored.

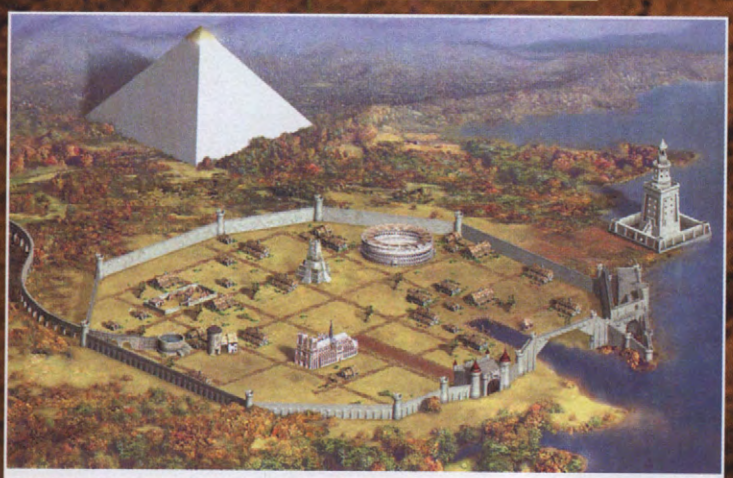
The bright ideas don't stop there either. We were shown huge armies of mutated monstrosities and the developers were keen to point out that you'll be able to transfer these from single- to multiplayer games or vice versa. So, if your battle tactics aren't up to scratch you can always attempt to bewilder your opponent to death with abominations like the 'rhinofish' or 'wolfant'.

Once again, the developers were keen to inform us that they're scaling back the levels of micro-management in favour of a more streamlined, fast-paced approach. One of the team, Alex Garden, was also keen to point out that having the ability to create your own units is changing the rules of a standard RTS by allowing the player to have more freedom.

Whether this will reveal desperate gameplay imbalances is something we will keep a close eye on. One thing that's not up for dispute is the way *Sigma* gives players the chance to exercise their own imagination and creativity. That's something us gamers have had little opportunity to do recently, and on that score alone *Sigma* could be a real breath of fresh air.



The many faces of *Civilization III*.



And it used to be such a beautiful forest.

CIVILIZATION III

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Firaxis
PUBLISHER Infogrames
WEBSITE www.firaxis.com
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Winter 2001

The *Civilization III* stand was a parody of the game itself with seemingly hundreds of people all attempting to occupy the same space. Still, after much pushing and shoving we managed to work our way to the front of the ruck where the delicate aspects of finding and trading goods were explained to us.

Unlike previous offerings, the best spots to start building your empire on are not evident at the start of the game, meaning there's no point continually restarting in order to find the best patch of land to start building your colony on. So, while there are still tradeable goods dotted around the map, you can't see them until you've researched the technology that allows you to use them. For example, you could be right on top of a vast supply of medicinal herbs, but won't actually be able to benefit from these until you discover and research medicine.

From what we saw, many other sections of the game such as diplomacy, the graphics engine and battles have been hugely updated and there are many original ideas in there too.

The most significant one we saw is the concept of culture. Structures within your city that promote art and philosophy increase the cultural rating; the older the buildings – the more impressive they are. An ancient library or temple for example, provides greater cultural benefits than a football stadium. Ultimately this adds yet another angle to the game and will definitely help those who prefer the economic side of the game to the aggressive invasion policy. You could say it's more New Labour than Conservative, but who cares about politics anyway?

EMPIRE EARTH



Don't think much of those boots.



This game is smokin'.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Stainless Steel Studios
PUBLISHER Sierra
WEBSITE www.sierrastudios.com
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Late 2001

Empire Earth is what you might call an ambitious project. The final game will boast five campaigns spanning 12 epochs of history. 'Epic' is too clichéd a word to describe a game that covers more than 500,000 years of human conflict; and as far as developer Stainless Steel is concerned, the words 'gruelling' and 'painstaking' are probably far closer to the truth.

Still, in our opinion you only get out of a game what you put in, and *EE* contains everything from Cro-Magnon man to Nazi bunkers and beyond. In other words we're talking *Age Of Empires*, *Sudden Strike* and *Starcraft* in one finely tuned package with more than 200 distinct units. Don't forget that all this is in full 3D, and we were shown how you can zoom down to see the colour of soldiers' eyes, or plant yourself in the cockpit of a Spitfire as it screams out of the sky.

As we stood watching the demo it became apparent that *Empire Earth* is going to be big. The attention to detail is both spectacular and realistic, even smoke from battles slowly starts to drift across the play area making it difficult to see your enemies. *EE* is another in a new breed of RTSs attempting to make use of line-of-sight routines, meaning that archers, snipers or laser weapons are much more effective from elevated places such as roofs and hilltops.

Empire Earth was showing a great deal of promise at the show, and is yet another game we'll be keeping close tabs on.

STAR WARS GALACTIC BATTLEGROUNDS

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Lucas Arts
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE www.lucasarts.com
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Winter 2001

Our investigations at the show revealed that despite the use of the *Age Of Empires* engine within *Star Wars Galactic Battlegrounds*, Ensemble is not actually coding the title or even directly involved as such. As far as we can ascertain, they are being used as technical consultants to ensure the in-house programming team at LucasArts maximise the potential of the *AOE* engine, so it's more than possible that we're set to have the best of both worlds, with two such highly respected developers working together on the project.

However, from what we saw, the graphics were looking somewhat dated, but there were a huge amount of instantly recognisable units, and some of the battles were truly epic affairs with hundreds of units on screen at a time with no visible slowdown.

The jury is still out on this one, and it could go either way. It's *Star Wars*, it's by LucasArts and it's using the *AOE* engine. Surely that's enough to make a cracking game? Or is it? We'll have to wait and see.



Here come the Gugons. Quick, everbody laugh.



You'll have hundreds of units on screen at the same time.



Core blimey, it's...

PROJECT EIDEN

Anthony Holden **went to Derby expecting a biodome full of hippies, but what he found was a far more disturbing environment**

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Core Design
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE www.projectedengame.com
OUT September

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's a first/third-person action game from the team behind the original *Tomb Raider*
- Switching freely between the four squad members under your control, the emphasis is on puzzling and co-operation rather than shooting
- Enemies will be gifted with powerful AI routines, and will morph horrifically in real time
- The four-way co-operative multiplayer mode and squad-based deathmatch could just be what it's all about

In the rock music world, it is common to speak of the "difficult second album", in reference to the pressure put on a band to match the achievements of their first hit record. The assumption is that before achieving fame, they have nothing to lose, nothing to live up to and no one telling them what to do, thus erecting no barriers to their creativity and ambition. Plus they don't have enough money to while away every night on champagne and daiquiri binges, snorting cocaine from the navels of nubile nymphets and shooting pharmaceutical grade smack into their eyeballs, so



The flycam is indespensable, but eats energy.



Co-operative multiplayer with 1-4 players promises to be superb.

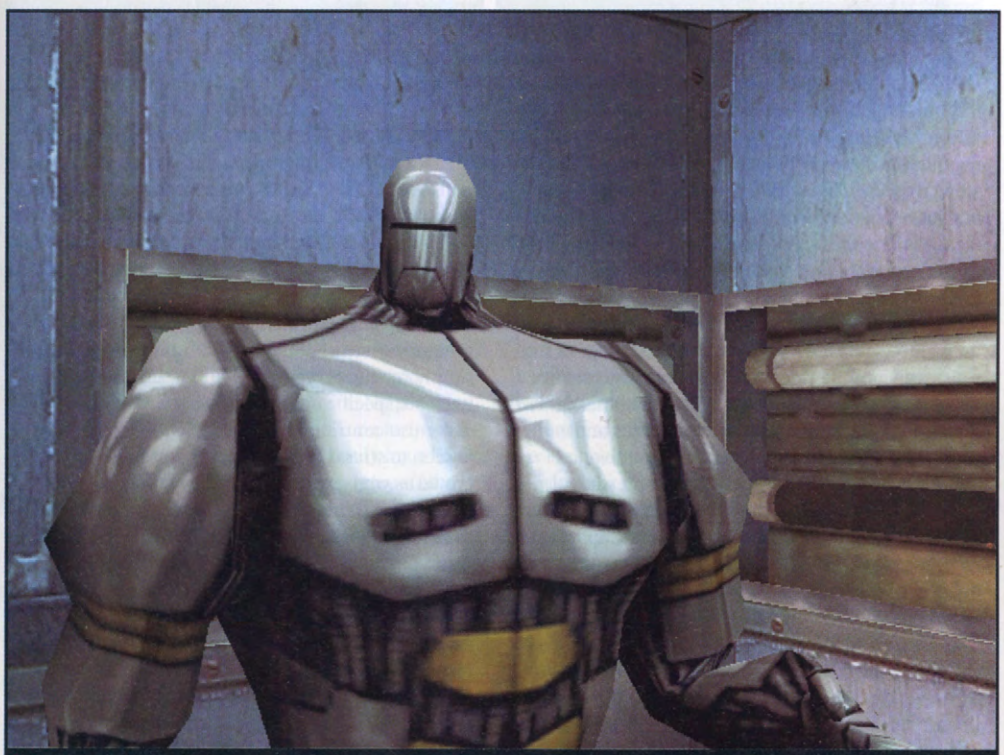
they're usually relatively coherent. Now, we're not trying to suggest that the talented people at Core Design are a bunch of whacked-out coke-heads with more money than they know what to do with and a penchant for corrupting the innocent – heaven forbid – we're simply grasping for a tenuous parallel between the game that made their fortunes and a great rock album. The difference is, of course, in the hard-bitten world of rock, not even the most insipid soft-rock studio band has the luxury of putting out four remix albums, each shamelessly reworking the ideas in the original, licensing out the film rights, signing a cross-promotional deal with a major sports drink and bundling copies of the original record with inkjet refill cartridges before attempting something new. Even in the games industry it's something of an indulgence. Despite all this, and even four years after their first big hit, team *Tomb Raider* are under considerable pressure to match their former achievement, and their historically troubled second album is an ambitious affair called *Project Eden*.

SOPHOMORE BLUES

Luckily, *Tomb Raider* evangelists and Lara knockers alike can rest easy, as *Project Eden* is not only looking rather stunning, but very different from the game that bankrolled it. *PC ZONE* recently visited Core in their flash Derby HQ to have a chat with the *Eden* team and examine the latest build, and we were suitably impressed with what we saw. We also took home the first fully playable beta, cut that very day, the code practically still wet on the page. It was the first build in which all twelve levels of the game were playable, the cut-scenes in place, the puzzles working smoothly and the enemies lurking in all the right shadows. All that remains now for the *Eden* team is to refine the AI, add a few trimmings like speech and text and get to work nailing down the bugs. Everything is coming together after four long years of development, and the mood in the *Eden* nerve centre on our visit was accordingly relaxed and confident. As level designer and mapper Neil Boyd explains: "We've been given tweaking time – an extra two or three months that we didn't think we'd have, so we're really going to be able to put a lot of polish on the finished product."

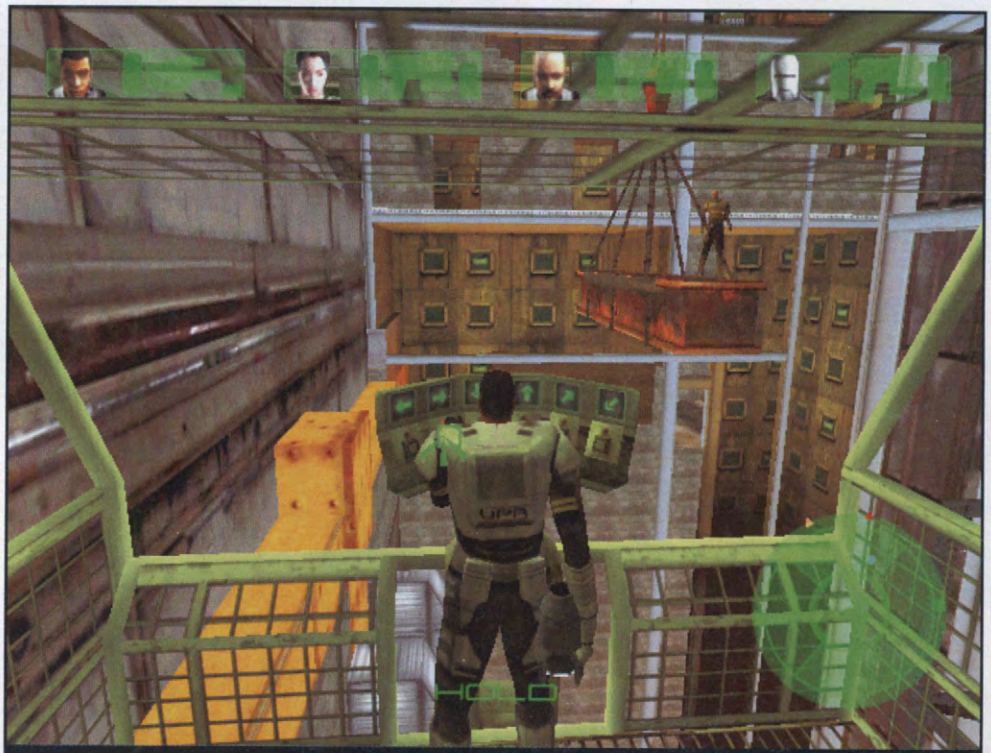
"Team *Tomb Raider* are under considerable pressure to match their former achievement"

However, the game has not been without its fair share of troubles, just as the old rock 'n' roll wisdom predicted. Originally due out around this time last year, *Eden* has suffered from some serious delays and undergone many changes along the way. Core weren't being completely transparent about the reasons for the slippage, but we suspect some of it has to do with recurring back-to-the-drawing-board moments when other games beat them to the punch on their unique selling points. When initially conceived, *Eden* was a narrative-led first-person actioner featuring dynamic environments and an unprecedented level of interaction with NPCs... Brilliant idea – until *Half-Life* crashed through the FPS roof and started spraying innovation from every angle. Switching to a first/third-person affair with an emphasis on gadgetry and puzzling, their attempts to innovate were again scuttled by a raft of like-minded


Affectionately known as Metal Mickey by the team, Amber may be slow, but she does have heat-seeking missiles.


You'll be ambushed by enemies at regular intervals.


Good doggy, nice doggy.

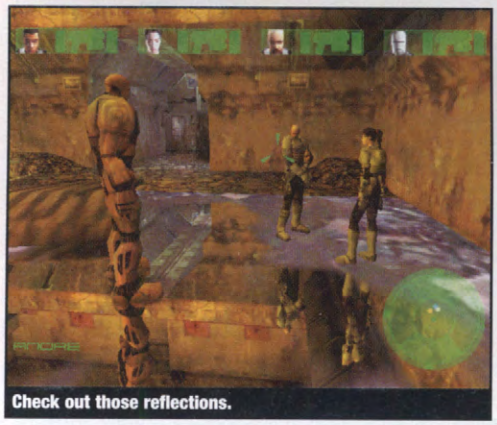

Not the most taxing moment in the game, but entertaining as ever.

games on PC and console – *MDK 2* and *Perfect Dark* springing instantly to mind. The latter even had a flycam, one of the nicest bits of gadgetry available in Core's title. Sigh...

A NEW NIGHTMARE

However, while *Project Eden* is unlikely to blow the lid off the 3D action genre, it's still a remarkably distinctive game, imbued with enough atmosphere and well-executed ideas to overcome any amount of hypercritical nit-picking by *PC ZONE* killjoys. The setting for the game, while drawing on familiar sci-fi themes, is intriguing enough in itself, taking place as it does in a world of ever-expanding diameter, the sprawling cities growing insanely upwards in response to the unrelenting demand for space. In the upper reaches, where sunlight still penetrates the criss-crossing skyways and towering edifices, reside the very rich. Predictably, as you descend, things start to get nasty, the strata of society made literal in the increasingly dim and dangerous layers of squalid slumland, where gangs of genetic mutants and cannibals rule the perpetual night and unthinkable creatures thrive in their numbers. Of course, when you step into the game, you're not one of the very rich – you're a cop, or actually four cops, sent from the Urban Protection Agency to investigate some trouble at a mid-level artificial meat factory (dubbed Real Meat, with inevitable Orwellian irony).

The plot kicks off from there, soon exposing a vicious genetically mutated gang known as the Death Heads, and the first hints of the terrible corruption and suffering behind the mystery of *Project Eden*. Each of the game's 11 levels is more nightmarish than the last, as your squad descends deeper into the city's nether regions, encountering ever more frightful denizens along the way. The morphing ability of the enemies has been spoken of in these pages before, but now that we've experienced it first hand we can confirm that it's extremely unnerving. You can be strolling along an area of town still populated by civilians, intent on solving some puzzle or other, when a seemingly unassuming resident will grab his head, stretch it into a vile scaly protuberance and transform into a nasty scuttling thing with no business in a consumer district. Increasingly dark, wretched environments and eerie sound effects contribute to the chilling ambience, which deviates well into survival horror territory.


Check out those reflections.


The voice acting in cut scenes is top notch.

The skill with which the squad dynamic has been incorporated is also likely to set the game apart from its peers, with each level and puzzle built very deliberately around the various abilities of your team. These skills will probably be familiar by now: Minoko is the computer hacker, required whenever a computer interface presents; Carter is the leader of the pack, with access to special information and security levels; Andre is the DIY man, an engineer handy for fixing the many broken devices found in the city's lower realms; and Amber, the robot, can withstand heat and harsh environments. Most of the larger puzzles are built around combining the skills of your squad in ever more inventive ways, and you'll find yourself switching characters with great regularity. Use of the various gadgets at your disposal is also essential – mobile rover devices, flycams, auto gun sentries. These are a lot of fun to play with in their own right, though their use is occasionally in danger of becoming repetitive (your path is blocked, there's a hole at ground level – hmm, maybe you need to spawn a rover...). But it does result in a far greater variety of potential solutions to puzzles than simply relying on your bipedal associates. The need to locate specific items such as batteries and data disks also contributes to this variety, a fact the team is keen to stress. "We're trying to appeal to the action crowd as well as people who play point-and-click adventures. With all the puzzles and items you have to use, it's a lot like a graphic adventure in some ways, just in a full 3D world."

REDUCE, RE-USE, RECYCLE

Another key element is the concept of a shared energy resource. Every gadget that is spawned and weapon fired draws from a character's energy supply, which may only be replenished at intermittent recharge points. The ability to draw energy from enemies and team-mates by use of a special Extractor weapon is

CV

CORE DESIGN

There's more to Core than just Lara, although, you'd be hard pressed to notice lately

1988 Core is born out of the ruins of Gremlin's Derby studios and *Rick Dangerous* becomes an instant hit on Amiga and Atari ST.

1992 After churning out a host of successful 8- and 16-bit games for various consoles, Core enters a lucrative relationship with Sega, producing titles for MegaDrive and Mega-CD. *Thunderhawk* is a rare Mega-CD highlight.

1996 The bombshell drops. *Tomb Raider* is released. Lara is born. Nothing will ever be the same again for Core or the videogame world.

2001 Apart from *Fighting Force*, it's been pretty much Lara all the way on every conceivable platform for the last half a decade. Behind the media shitstorm, development of *Project Eden* has quietly continued, and Core is finally ready to throw off the one-trick-pony mantle and cement its leading-edge reputation.



"Spare a bit of change for a cup of tea, guv?"

also promised, although, this device wasn't working properly in the build we saw. Since each team member is essential to your mission, they obviously cannot be allowed to die, the compromise being they respawn at the most recent checkpoint with a fraction less energy. This emphasis on conserving energy becomes more marked as the game progresses.

A conscious decision was also made early in the development cycle to keep the control interface to a minimum. When not under your control, the other team members can be set to either 'follow' or not follow, and this stripped-down approach is applied across the board. "Did you notice there's no jump button?" offers designer Stuart Atkinson, "it's a decision we made, about 18 months ago?

"Gangs of genetic mutants and cannibals rule the perpetual night and unthinkable creatures thrive"

But we don't think many people will notice – we haven't seen anyone searching around for a jump key." To be honest though, this is debatable – we actually think you will notice, but that doesn't mean the lack of athleticism will necessarily detract from the gameplay. Having said that, there is one moment where a chasm must be negotiated by the team, a simple dilemma that requires you to locate and operate a mechanically driven platform. No problem there, except that the gap in question is no more than a couple of metres across, and could easily have been leapt by a more balletic game character. Hopefully, rude moments like this, which rub your disability in your face, will be eliminated in the final cut, in which case your dexterity will be more than adequate for the task at hand. In particular, the much-talked-about ability to shoot over your shoulder remains a nice addition to the roster of movements, and proves a much more realistic and credible solution than either a dumbed down lock-on system or far-fetched speed-strafing powers.

"No ladders either," continues Atkinson, "there's not a single ladder in the whole game. They never work very well – you always see people creeping up to the edge to climb down, then just falling off and dying. We didn't want that." The result of all this deliberate simplicity is a game that puts a lot more emphasis on operating machinery, solving puzzles and managing your squad over traditional FPS skills. In short, they want to make you think.

"We'd hate people to think we were trying to compete with *Quake*," says Boyd, "it's not a shooting game. There is some shooting, but the pace is much more plodding, you really have to use your brain." Even when you are engaging in gunplay, the game is unlike most other shooters, due to a combination of exceptional enemy AI and uncomplicated control options – plus, of course, you generally have up to three team-mates by your side helping you dispatch the mutant scum. The AI is far from complete in the version we played, but even at this early stage there's evidence of something special. The bad guys duck, roll and dodge your laser spray, fire from cover and co-ordinate their attacks. The *Eden* team have put particular emphasis on the way they use their environments, and the coders have gone to great lengths to make editing tools that allow the designers to determine the way the enemies behave in each map, giving power back to the people who actually envisaged the levels in the first place.

"There's lots of stuff we can do as the artists to influence what the bad guys do on the map," Neil Boyd explains. "We can put down waypoints and stuff to tell them: this is a good place to hide, this is a good place to attack from, so hopefully they look like they make really intelligent decisions – like when they're under fire they're going to run off and hide, not just run around aimlessly. That's the aim anyway and we're pretty happy with the way things are going."

Having played the almost-finished product quite extensively, we can happily report that we too are pretty happy with the way things are going. *Project Eden* is going to be good, and if some niggling problems can be fixed between now and September, it might just be something truly great. If all goes to plan, we'll have a full review next issue. PC

MIGHTY MORPHIN'

Turn and face the ch.. ch.. changes

One of the coolest tricks achieved by the *Project Eden* team is their enemy morphing routines, which allow seemingly innocent bystanders or cute widdle puppy dogs to transform into hideous, slavering freaks of genetic tampering that would make Cronenberg proud. Here's a little taste of what you can expect come September.


Just a redneck, not worth wasting weapon energy on...


Hang on, what's he up to?


Ah, just doing the crab. I love that trick.


Waargh! Kill it, kill it!



Run away!

RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP XTREME

Having recently tried the real thing, *Steve Hill* returns to the sanctity of pretend rally driving

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Warthog
PUBLISHER Actualize
WEBSITE www.warthog.co.uk
OUT End of year

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Six different regions
- 28 authentic WRC cars
- Features the voice of Marcus Dodd
- Music by 808 State

For the virtual rally fan with cash to burn, the options are becoming ever more bewildering. Indeed, with the graphical advances of recent years, it takes a finely honed eye to actually tell the various titles apart. The cars are indistinguishable, the tracks pass by in a cloud of dust, and the roar of the engine is a given. More than with most genres, it comes down to pure gameplay, which is, of course, heavily informed by the handling of the cars, and the inherent physics employed. What we're trying to say is here's another bleeding rally game.

Anyone who remembers *International Rally Championship* from the same publisher will recall the meticulous attention to detail that went towards precisely recreating actual stages. Hundreds of miles of video footage was utilised, and painstakingly pieced together to create an Ordnance Survey level of accuracy, as demonstrated by the on-screen appearance of an actual map. It was a mammoth achievement, and one that led to a game that was considered by aficionados to be... a bit dull.

HOGGING THE TRACK

It made for great press releases, but the reality was that driving in a straight line through ten miles of unchanging Welsh forestry was erring on the side of realism over fun. And as thanks for its efforts, developer Magnetic Fields didn't have its contract renewed. The task this time round has fallen to Cheshire neighbours, Warthog, the outfit behind respectable space combat affair, *Starlancer*.

NINE MONTHS AFTER

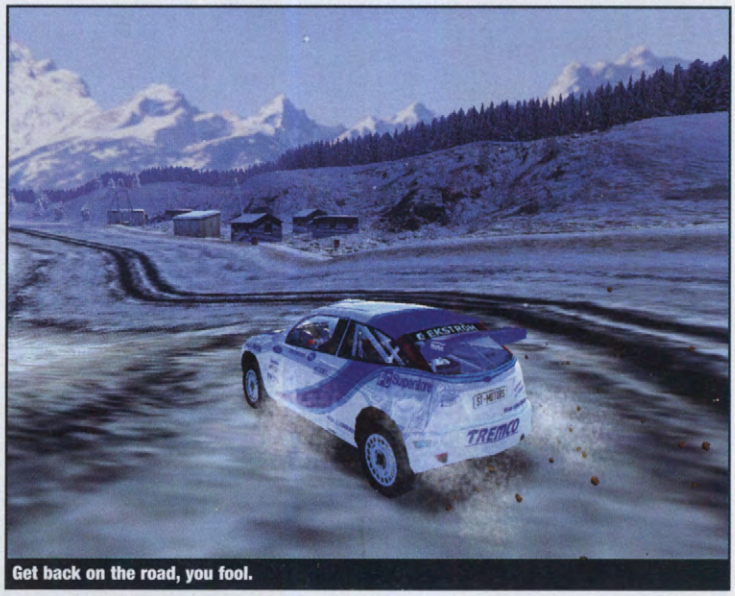
Warthog seems to be making a reasonable fist of it too. Without using anything from *International Rally Championship*, in the space of nine months the game is almost ready for testing. And having had the realism of the previous title rammed down our throats, the opposite is now the case. As producer Lee Clare explains: "We've moved more away from that. The lads have gone for a bit of artistic licence to make it more interesting. We just wanted to spice it up a bit."

What this means is that they've taken the basic look of a region and attempted to fashion challenging, playable tracks around it. The regions in question are Scotland, Wales, The Isle Of Man, The Arctic, Kenya and America, each boasting four stages. From the early version we played, there seems to be a reasonable degree of freedom, enabling you to lurch off the beaten track and drive along a river bed, for instance. An advanced damage model is also in place, with the car shedding body parts like autumnal leaves.

> **"Without using anything from *International Rally Championship* in the space of nine months the game is almost ready for testing"**

Various arcade modes will be available, as well as a privateer option where you, "start off in a really smelly car" and attempt to reach the upper echelons of the sport. Much like Colin McRae, whose endorsed game is generally agreed to be the one to dislodge. The producer of *Rally Championship Xtreme* is confident though, claiming: "I think the physics are better. *McRae* is bang on, but it's arcade and we've gone for more of a simulation."

Now that's fighting talk. More words here soon. PCZ



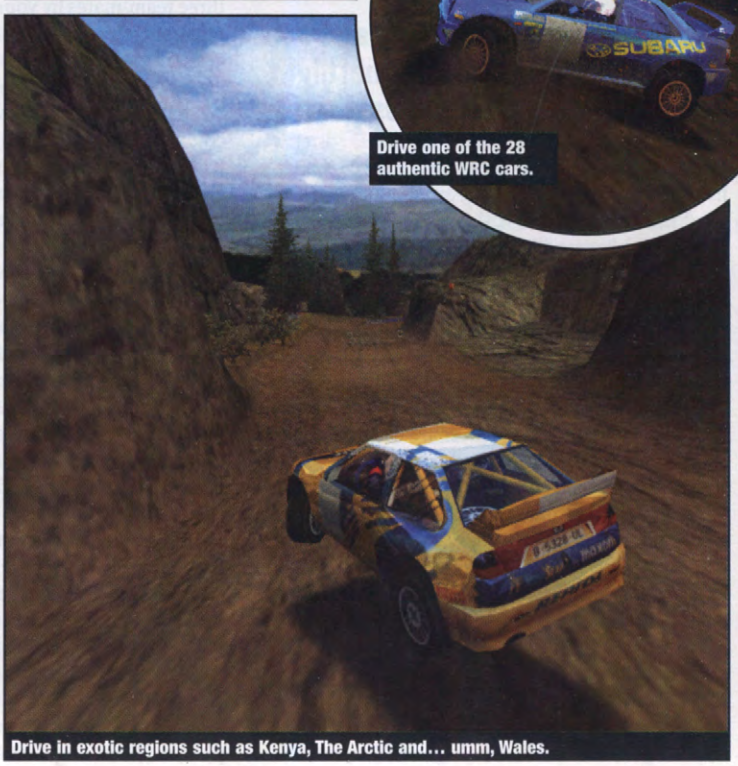
Get back on the road, you fool.



Mind those logs.

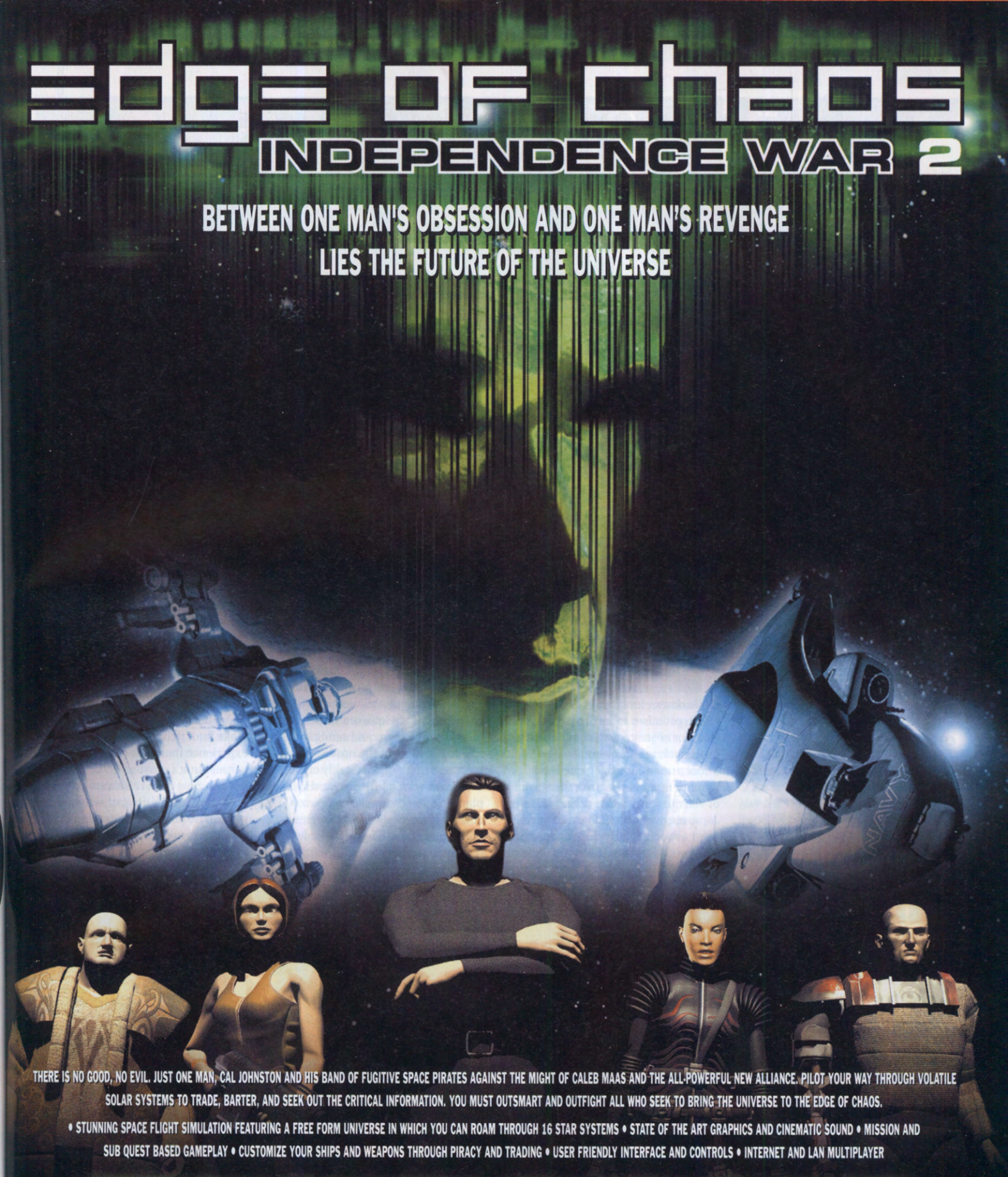


Drive one of the 28 authentic WRC cars.


Drive in exotic regions such as Kenya, The Arctic and... umm, Wales.

edge of chaos
INDEPENDENCE WAR 2

BETWEEN ONE MAN'S OBSESSION AND ONE MAN'S REVENGE
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INFOGRAMES

www.edgeofchaos.net **www.independencewar2.com**

PC CD ROM

PARTICLE SYSTEMS

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Evil warlords beware it's THRONE OF DARKNESS



Japanese mythology and American football meet in an action-packed RPG, or maybe *Chris Anderson* is just a little mixed up

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Click Entertainment
PUBLISHER Sierra
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Summer 2001
WEBSITE www.sierrastudios.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Action-based role-player with Japanese mythological theme
- Unique tactical plays enable players to customise strategies and formations
- Online multiplay supports up to 35 players online at once
- Varying levels of complexity allow players to customise the difficulty level so the game can be played tactically or as a straightforward hack-and-slash affair

There aren't many 'tactical' RPGs knocking about. In fact, unless we're mistaken there aren't any at all. Click Entertainment appears to be changing all that with *Throne Of Darkness*, an action-based RPG which promises to incorporate a real element of strategy to complement its frenetic real-time combat. The initial premise for the game is a familiar one: take control of a group of warriors and overtake an evil Japanese warlord. This could have been a spectacularly dull prospect if *Throne Of Darkness* followed the path of the many hack-and-slash offerings we've been boring ourselves with of late, but Click is working around the clock to produce something that will stand out as genuinely unique in its genre. Players will take control of a clan consisting of seven samurai, each with unique abilities and characteristics. However, rather than just grouping them and sending them rushing in to meet the hordes of monsters that will inevitably come their way, with a little forward planning you can make complex custom formations and strategies, which you can call upon in the heat of battle. This is referred to as 'play-calling', something we would normally associate with American football, but we fully expect *TOD* to be a lot more exciting than America's favourite sport (which, let's face it, can't be difficult).

OFFENCE AND DEFENCE

These tactical plays will undoubtedly make for a richer single-player experience than is normal for this genre, but it's obvious *TOD* will benefit most from this strategic option in the multiplayer side of the game. The possibilities are endless for players to develop unique and unexpected ways to overcome their

CV CLICK

CLICK ENTERTAINMENT

After working on the original *Diablo*, Ben Haas and Doron Isaac Gartner founded Click Entertainment in 1997. *Throne Of Darkness* is their second game.

1998 In order to make a quick profit and bring in funding for a larger project, the boys and girls at Click knocked out *Barbie Super Sports* in just six months. It was a huge success, going to number one in the PC Data's Children's Games Chart. The game is also available for the PlayStation.



Will the samurai warrior survive for 20, 40 or 60 seconds? Place your bets now.



Each samurai warrior will have their own unique abilities.

opponents, as human beings are far more unpredictable than their computer-driven counterparts. The multiplayer game pits four player-controlled clans, each consisting of seven different samurai, against a computer-controlled clan (the evil warlord and his minions). A total of 35 players are allowed to get into the game and kick the hell out of each other while attempting to overthrow the evil one and his followers. This form of co-operative play against human and computer components is certainly a unique take on the multiplayer RPG genre, and if the character classes for each clan are sufficiently different, it should make for an intriguing challenge online.

TURNING JAPANESE

Japanese mythology is represented heavily in every aspect of the game. The units, environments, backgrounds and storyline all emanate a distinctly Japanese flavour, which again shows Click's commitment to producing something outside of the norm. The huge success of *Shogun: Total War* proves the appeal of Japanese mythology, and if anything, *Throne Of Darkness*' comparatively simplistic gameplay (*Shogun* was a bit heavy for some) should broaden its appeal and enable them to reach a bigger potential audience.

Although comparisons to *Shogun* will be inevitable given *TOD*'s subject matter, the similarity between the two titles looks likely to end at the reference to Japanese themes. The tactical plays may inject an element of strategy to the game, but Click's offering is an action game at heart.

In an effort to appeal to as many types of gamer as possible, *TOD* has different levels of complexity. Players can customise gameplay to an extent, so advanced users can draw heavily on the tactical play, and casual gamers (or people who are just more into hack-and-slash) can bypass all this stuff and play the game in a *Diablo* style.

You may be wondering at this point where exactly the RPG element comes into play. Again, *Diablo* proves a good reference point here. Gameplay involves levelling up your characters and buying and selling items to improve them in battle. Character classes are made up from the usual array of fantasy types such as swordsmen, mages, berserkers and etc, so in this sense *TOD* will be a familiar experience for those of you who have played your fair share of RPGs.

Although the four clans in the game all use the same character classes, *TOD* will have a certain degree of replayability depending on which clan you start the game with. Each clan starts at a different castle and takes a different path through the game. The characters in the clans also have different histories and different personal sub-quests to complete, so replaying the game with another clan has its benefits. However, we suspect that once players get the basics of the game having completed it, they will head online to pit their wits against 'real' opponents.

Throne Of Darkness has potential to cause a bit of a stir on its release. And as ever, *PC ZONE* will be on hand to give you the lowdown on the final version when it arrives. PZ



Feeding time at the wolf pound.



Burn, burn, burn, burn, burn.

Q&A

BEN HAAS



Ben Haas is co-founder of Click Entertainment and an outspoken evangelist for TOD. *We quizzed him on the finer points of this new role-player*

PCZ What makes *Throne Of Darkness* different to other action RPGs?

BEN HAAS: *Throne Of Darkness* is the fastest action RPG ever made. The combat is extremely intense and strategic.

PCZ Can you tell us more about the tactical plays?

BH: The tactics were designed to give the user total control over more than one character. The player can customise up to 12 different tactics. Inside the tactics editor the user can set up different formations as well as setting aggression and attack stance.

PCZ Why the oriental theme?

BH: This game is a tribute to Akira Kurosawa and the movie *Throne of Blood*.

PCZ How does the plot develop in the single-player game?

BH: The single-player personal quests have 12 different cut-scenes which develop the plot. There are three quests per castle in a single-player game, so in order to unlock all the cinematics the players must play all four castles in single-player.

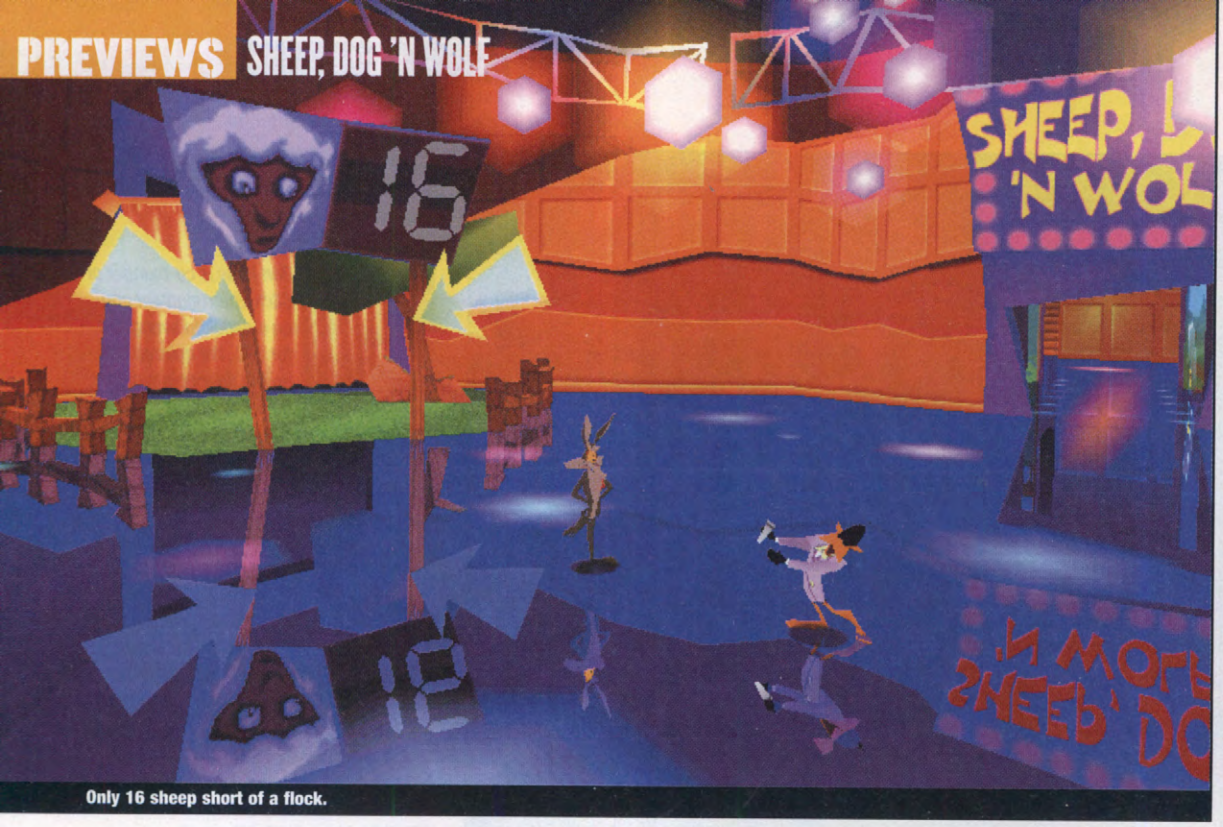
PCZ Will players set up their own multiplayer servers or are you going to supply one on your site?

BH: We will be storing characters at Sierra.com. However, we are using the *Half-Life* model rather than the Battle.net model so people will be able to run their own servers through Sierra.com.

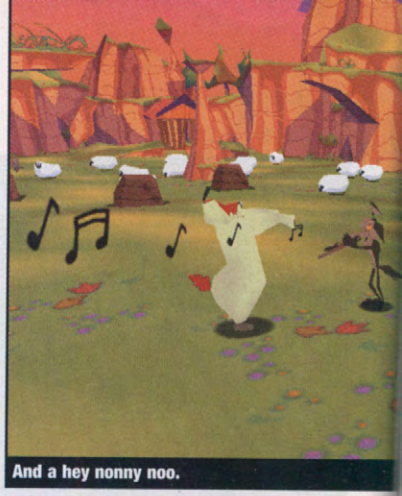
PCZ Weapon and armour creation: how does it work?

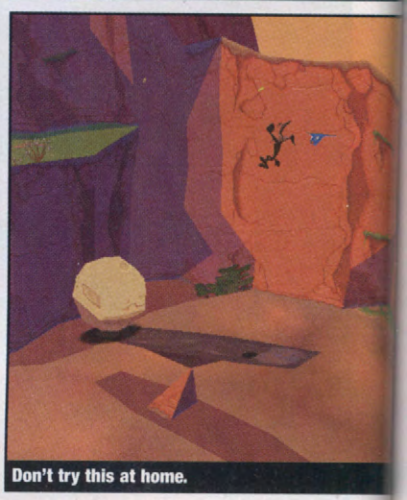
BH: In *TOD* you are able to customise weapons and armour using monster parts and gems as components. This will add powerful magic to even basic items.

PCZ Thanks, that was very interesting.



Only 16 sheep short of a flock.


And a hey nonny noo.


Don't try this at home.

Sheep ahoy...

SHEEP, DOG 'N WOLF

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Infogrames
PUBLISHER Infogrames
WEBSITE www.infogrames.com
OUT August 2001

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The world's first rustle 'em up
- And a decent puzzle game to boot
- Packed with classic Acme gadgets
- And the ability to disguise yourself as a bush



Left, left, left, jump. Wait a minute, there's something different going on here and *Dave Woods* is flocking impressed

Back in the halcyon days of my pre-school youth I remember being deeply disturbed by an episode of Look And Read (which was pretty horrific at the best of times) that featured cattle rustlers hell bent on stripping rural Wales of its jailbait. The 20-minute shocker was filled with shots of mud, gratuitous shots of green Wellington boots and menacing ankles, followed by 20mph truck chases down winding country lanes, and the net result was that these protagonists went straight to the top of my 'most evil' list. I've learned a lot since then, and after several brushes with archetypal farmers, I wish the rustlers of the world nothing but luck, and spend most days damning the fact that I'm not brave enough to risk buckshot on the arse or the sight of farmers barking at the moon.

Luckily, I can now live out my rustling fantasies and stick two fingers up to the farmers of the world on the PC, and what's more, there's not a West Country accent in sight. *Sheep, Dog 'N Wolf* is the first in a new genre, the rustle 'em up, and it lets you take the starring role of Ralph Wolf (Wile E Coyote's cousin apparently), tasked with stealing sheep from under the watchful gaze of Sam the Sheepdog.

If it sounds familiar then you might have caught some of the obscure cartoons penned around the same concept – the first one was released in 1953 under the title *Don't Give Up The Sheep* and became a massive hit in Wales. See the boxout for the tragic story behind the fairytale.


Guess who's coming to dinner?

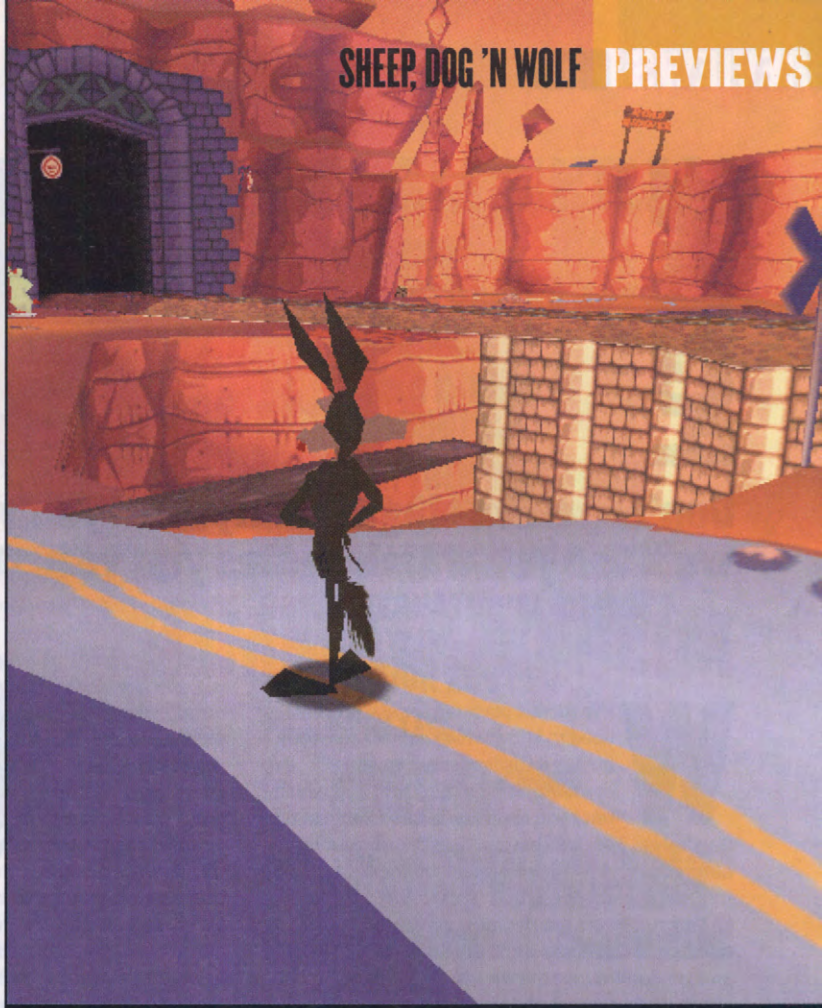
BAAAAAHHHH

The premise in *Sheep, Dog 'N Wolf* is simple: get in, get a sheep, get out. If Sam spots you, you get thumped in typical Looney Tunes style. You don't die and you don't have to go back to the beginning of the level. Thus promoting progression through careful thought and eliminating the frustration you'd feel if you spent an hour getting to the last stage in the level just to make a simple mistake that forces you to do the whole thing again.

At the start of each level you get a fly-by, which shows increasingly large levels packed with obstacles, mailboxes, seesaws (or teeterboards in the unlikely event that any Americans are reading this preview), bushes you can hide in and lettuce you can lure the sheep with. You also get to access some of the best Acme gadgets, such as rockets, dynamite and my favourite,


Kerr-twang!!!!!!!!!


All this for a measly sheep.


No sheep, no dog and one wolf.

scent of sheep, which are available through mailboxes conveniently scattered across the levels.

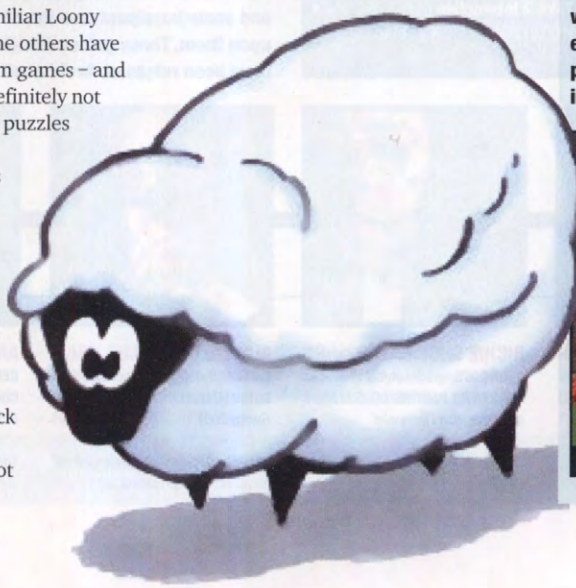
DOUBLE OR MUTTON

Whenever you get near Sam and his flock a radar icon appears showing you which way Sam's head is facing. When it's green you're getting close but you're not in any danger. If it turns orange it means you're in his range and you need to engage stealth mode and should only move when his head's facing away from you. Red means a chase and most of the time a clip around the ear.

So it's not really familiar Loony Tunes stuff – most of the others have been mediocre platform games – and *Sheep, Dog 'N Wolf* is definitely not aimed at children. The puzzles are too hard after the opening training levels and the pace of the game is way too slow and cranial. In my mind this poses a bit of a conundrum. Because of the Looney Tunes connection, it's the sort of game parents are going to pick up in the shop without realising that they're not getting a fluffy toy. And, for the very same reason the game's going to get overlooked by pretty much everyone else – I hadn't really given it a single thought until this preview code arrived in the office.

If it does sink without a trace it would be a shame, because behind the cosy cartoon graphics there appears to be a puzzle game with potential. We'll find out if it lives up to it next month, when we should have completed review code and access to the the game's full 16 levels. PZ

"You get access to some of the best Acme gadgets, such as dynamite and scent of sheep, which are available through mailboxes scattered across the levels"



THAT'S ALL FOLKS

Behind the laughter, lurks a dark, dark world...

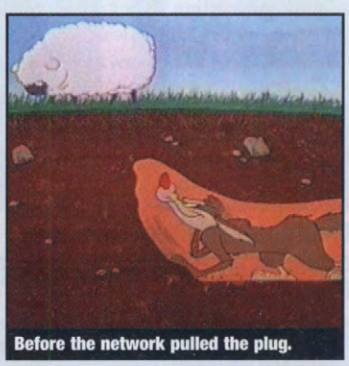
You might think of the cartoon world as a glamorous happy go lucky sort of place, but behind the countless frames of joy and happiness lurks a seamier side, of stars and their egos, and crumpled, broken failures.

Sam Sheepdog and Ralph Coyote made their debut in the heady 1950s, with *Don't Give Up The Sheep*, and had a huge impact when Ralph attempted to trick Sam into giving up his sheep by hiding inside a bush. Because of their ingenuity they weren't off the big screen for long, and the next year smashed their way back in *Sheep Ahoy*, when the pair thought they'd entrenched themselves in the public consciousness with the introduction of the teeterboard.

However, many analysts predicted they'd peaked too early, and in hindsight, playing your trump card in only your second cartoon is a mistake of epic proportions. In desperation, Ralph and Sam tried to spice up the action with a drag scene (the infamous Little Bo Peep episode), but a horrified public switched off in droves.

Inevitably, it was all brought to an end in 1963 with *Woolen Under Where*, a cartoon that even lost the will to promote itself with a decent pun. After that, Sam hit the bottle hard and Ralph has had to spend almost 40 years watching his cousin, Wile E, become one of the Looney Tunes' biggest stars. That's showbiz folks.


Back in the glory days.


Before the network pulled the plug.

PCZONE REVIEWS

Don't spend a single penny until you've checked out the *ZONE* reviews first – we'll tell you which games you've just got to buy and which to avoid

MISSION STATEMENT

We're on this planet to serve you. You need to know which games are worth buying, which ones are worth considering for a rainy day, and which ones you should point and laugh at on the shelves. For that reason, *PC ZONE* works a little differently to any other magazine in the UK.

- Our reviewers are the most experienced and talented in the business. We're all massive gamers and we don't mince our words. If there are problems in a game, then we'll tell you about them, even if it means falling foul of certain big names in the industry.
- What's more, we will only review finished games, which means that any bugs we see within the game will be reported back to you. On occasions we are forced to review from gold masters, but this still means that what we see is what you get in the final boxed product.
- Occasionally, this means we can't review the multiplayer side of the game at the same time as the single-player review, as the servers aren't up and running. When this happens, we won't fudge the issue and claim that "multiplayer works well", we'll wait until the servers have been running successfully for a month before running a full second review in our Online section.
- We also make sure that we test out the games we review across a variety of different machines and graphics cards. In the office we have access to a whole range of different gaming PCs, from a lowly P233 up to the latest lGHz behemoth. If we spot differences between the minimum specifications and real-life testing then we'll let you know in the review.
- Our scoring system is the most honest in the industry. If a game is average, then we'll give it 50 per cent. If it's not worth knowing then we'll give it the burial it deserves. On the flipside, you won't find many games getting 90 per cent or above, the pre-requisite for our Classic award. Since issue 85 (and the introduction of the new scoring system), we've only given out eight Classics and this proves that a game has to be pretty special to get the award.
- We also make sure that every game is reviewed by an expert in the field, which means that each of our reviews can be placed in context with other games of that genre. You won't see a first-person shooter being reviewed by an RTS fan, and you can be sure that the person reviewing a game has played all the important titles in that particular field.
- Every now and again you might disagree with the treatment we've given a game. That's where our Feedback section comes in. This is where you get to have your say in *PC ZONE*, and where your rumblings are answered by the person who wrote the original review in the magazine.

ALL THE LATEST GAMES REVIEWED & RATED

WHERE TO CALL

Having trouble finding any of the games listed in the reviews section of the magazine'? Here are the numbers you need to call:

Acclaim 020 7344 5000 • **Activision** 08705 143525 • **Anco** 01322 292513 • **Blue Byte** (Germany) 49 0 208 450880 • **Codemasters** 01926 814132 • **Cryo** 01926 315552 • **Eidos Interactive** 020 8636 3000 • **Electronic Arts** 01932 450134 • **Empire Interactive** 020 8343 7337 • **Europress** 01625 855000 • **Gremlin Interactive** 0114 263 9900 • **GT Interactive** 020 8222 9700 • **Hasbro Interactive** 020 8569 1234 • **Infogrames** 0161 827 8000 • **Interplay** 020 7551 4222 • **Microids** (France) 00 33 146 01 54 01 • **Microsoft** 0345 002 000 • **Mattel** 01444 246333 • **NovaLogic** 020 7324 8900 • **Rage Software** 0151 237 2200 • **Take 2 Interactive** 01753 854 444 • **THQ** 01483 767656 • **Ubi Soft** 020 8944 9000 • **Zablac** 01626 332233

WHAT DO OUR SCORES MEAN?

90-100% If a game scores 90 or above, it probably means it's quite good. Classics are games that transcend their parts with the sheer quality of the finished product, creating an experience that will leave an indelible mark on your gaming memory. So, not bad then.

80-89% In this category you'll find great games that just fall short of being truly exceptional. From slightly-flawed genius to a perfectly-executed traditional concept, these might not be true Classics – but they're still worth having.

70-79% These scores are not necessarily a condemnation to gaming hell – in fact, we consider any game that falls into this category as worth checking out. Not Classic or excellent, just very good.

50-69% In this range you'll find games that go from the just-above-average to the alright-really-honest. They're usually good fun but have a limited long-term appeal. Read the review and find out if it's really what you're after before you decide to part with your cash.

20-49% These games just manage to keep their heads above the excrement, although a title scoring in the 20s is probably pretty poor. You can find a game that plays reasonably in this category, but you've been warned.

0-19% Some games are born pants and some have pantness thrust upon them. These games shouldn't have been released. Avoid at all costs.

MEET THE TEAM

All *PC ZONE*'s reviewers are experts in their field. We like to give every game that comes in for review the best chance, which is why we give it to a fan of the genre



DAVE WOODS
GENRE FPS, RPG, arcade
CURRENTLY PLAYING *Alice*

What's your favourite alien and why?

Cybermen. They rule.



RICHIE SHOEMAKER
GENRE RTS, space combat
CURRENTLY PLAYING *Chuckie Egg* and *Operation Flashpoint*

Cylons, because they have all the best lines.



MARTIN KORDA
GENRE Strategy, space combat
CURRENTLY PLAYING *Roland Garros 2001*

Prince Vultan. A comic genius, albeit for all the wrong reasons.



ANTHONY HOLDEN
GENRE FPS, action/adventure, arcade
CURRENTLY PLAYING *Project Eden Beta* and *Outzone*

Those blue dancing chicks from Jabba's palace.

PAST VS PRESENT

REVIEWS EDITOR Martin Korda



The whole world's gone retro, including the *PC ZONE* office. For the past month, everyone (bar me) has been whiling away their days playing games from the good ol' days of gaming (apparently), while boring disinterested work experience kids about the joys of the ZX Spectrum.

Now I like a bit of nostalgia as much as the next gamer, but if I hear one more person say, "Ahhhhh, this one's a classic," as they load up a jumped-up Pac Man game, with beeping sound effects and two-colour graphics, I'll end up in front of a jury on charges of mass murder. Of course, I'm confident I'd get off. I'd simply claim insanity brought on by mental cruelty from my work colleagues, after which I'd be let off all charges, put up in a mansion (rent free, of course) and given £50K a week spending money to help me forget my ordeal and reintegrate myself back into society.

I'd kick off my defence by playing the judge tapes of the constant barrage of bleeping, ticking and clicking noises which have filled the *ZONE* basement for the best part of a month. If that doesn't convince him outright, I'd show him the pieces of A4 paper plastered all over the office walls with *Chuckie Egg* high scores and 'DAVE IS DA BEST' and 'NO HE'S NOT, SIGNED RICHIE' slogans scrawled all over them. If he still hadn't broken down by this stage, and shouted, "This man has been hideously wronged," then I'd have to pull out the the big guns. I'd shock him with the tale of how Anthony would regularly sit for hours hunched over his keyboard with his tongue lolling out of the side of his mouth till the early hours of the morning, desperately trying to drill five foot deeper than Rhianna at *Mr Driller*. "Coming for a pint mate?" "No I can't, I'm too busy drilling."

So why haven't I been struck down by this craze? Simple. There are so many great new games out there that I'm itching to play, that I'm buggered if I'm wasting my life navigating a sprite the size of my thumb nail around a top-down 2D-maze, collecting diamond-shaped blobs while being chased by upside-down crisp packets with eyes. Appreciating the past is one thing, and I'm partial to the odd five minutes of retro gaming here and there (*Golden Axe* for example, is a timeless classic), but I'd still much rather play some of this month's new releases. They look better, sound better, have superior AI, and mainly pose far more of a challenge than pressing left and right while frantically hammering the space bar for 47 levels. They show just how far gaming has come, and point to a bright future, and as far as I'm concerned, that's definitely something worth shouting about.

A CLASS ACT



Certain games deserve to be elevated above and beyond the mass of titles on the shelves. For that reason we've made it hard for a game to receive our coveted Classic award and a score of 90 per cent and above. Each one will have to show originality, take their respective genres to new heights and represent a major step forward in PC gaming. Given this criteria, it would make us look a bit stupid if we awarded two or three every issue, and over the past 16 months since the introduction of our new scoring system we've only given out eight Classics.

This doesn't mean that all games scoring less should be ignored. Rather, the Classic tag points to the games that we can call true masterpieces and benchmark titles. The ones that are going to influence the direction of PC gaming in the near future. And it doesn't stop there. All review scores in our Top 100 are changed over time, to show their standing as and when new titles are released. So, a game that received 90 per cent a year ago, may not still be considered a Classic today. This means that on any given month you can find out exactly what we consider to be the best games in each genre.

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100 BUDGET ZONE
We cast our eyes over the new arrivals in the bargain bins.

102 FEEDBACK
Here's your chance to voice your opinions.



RHIANNA PRATCHETT
GENRE RPG, RTS, adventure
CURRENTLY PLAYING *Diablo II: Lord Of Destruction*

The Clangers. Quality children's entertainment with stuffed socks.



MARK HILL
GENRE Adventure, RPG, FPS, strategy
CURRENTLY PLAYING *Operation Flashpoint*

The aliens out of *Aliens*, because they've got acid for blood.



CHRIS ANDERSON
GENRE RPG, adventure, strategy
CURRENTLY PLAYING *Arcanum*

You don't get aliens in *EverQuest*.



PAUL PRESLEY
GENRE Simulation, action/adventure
CURRENTLY PLAYING *Operation Flashpoint*

Garr'Kunncz. He was very apologetic about the rectal probing.



STEVE HILL
GENRE Management, sport, arcade
CURRENTLY PLAYING *Anachronox*

The Clangers, because they taught me how to whistle.



KEITH PULLIN
GENRE Adventure, RTS, Golf
CURRENTLY PLAYING *Rollercoaster Tycoon*

The Mysterons, because they're soooo mysterious.



ARCANUM: OF STEAMWORKS & MAGICK OBSCURA

★ £34.99 • Havas • Out now

The forces of magic are at odds with high technology. Which side will *Chris Anderson* take? More importantly, does anyone care?

PC ZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

Have you ever looked at a character creation screen and wondered where the hell you were going to start? Well if you did, and you thought that was complex, try *Arcanum* on for size. This is no RPG for beginners, and although the character creation screen interface is as friendly as it can be under the circumstances, first-timers should really try their hand at something a bit easier before tackling this. Particularly since the game comes without a tutorial (which seems incredible given the wealth of information to digest).

Let me take you through the initial steps of building a character to give you an idea of what I mean. If it gets confusing at any point, don't blame me, send a letter to Troika requesting compensation for recurring headaches and a generally muddled sense of existence. First up, base stats. We all know what they are, right? Intelligence, strength, dexterity, perception, constitution, willpower, beauty and charisma. These attributes are all important, since they all affect your character in some way, either in terms of how they perform in certain situations, or how they are perceived by non-player characters in the game. Under normal circumstances, choosing how to build your character by distributing points into these areas would be no big deal, but there are so many skills available in *Arcanum* that are affected by these base attributes that you will need to pay special attention to how you develop them throughout the game.

As you progress (through fighting or successfully completing quests), you gain character points which you can use either to increase one of your base stats, or to get new spells or tech skills or improve one of the myriad of other skills to hand. Add to this that you can't put character points into certain things unless your base skill is high enough – and you realise how important it is to get your stats right in the beginning. While this may seem daunting initially, once you get into the game proper you will find it is a very, very good thing. Even if you mess



Not all quests require magic and muscle. Use the art of persuasion.



You will be doing a lot of trading early on, ie when you have no money.


Oops. We seem to be slightly overrun here.

up a bit at character creation (say you put all your points into dexterity when you really needed to increase intelligence for your caster) you can even the playing field by strengthening weak areas as you go along. Speaking of which, at least this part of it is not overtly complex, in fact, it's a straight choice between two completely different paths.

OF MAGIC AND MACHINES

The world of *Arcanum* is torn between those who dabble in the arcane arts, and those who much prefer to tinker about with steam engines and all manner of technological gadgets. This strange state of affairs came about thanks largely to a human called Bates who was raised by dwarves as a small child. At one time (as legend so fancifully would have it), only the dwarves were capable of building machinery. Bates was fascinated by all this and after becoming orphaned he made his home with the dwarves and learned of their secrets. Eventually, the dwarves came up with a prototype for a steam engine. Bates, in an impressive display of gratitude for his home and upbringing with the dwarves, nicked the prototype and ran off to make his fortune. Needless to say, Bates became rich from passing the steam engine off as his idea, and many people in *Arcanum*, inspired by these new technological developments, went off making gadgets of their own, much to the dismay of the magic-using contingency.

Everywhere you go in the game you will see evidence of the struggle between the two factions, and it affects your character to a great extent too. Not only have you (as the erstwhile hero) become embroiled in an age-old conflict between the dwarves, elves and dark elves (all of it to do with the dwarves getting the blame for Bates running off with their steam engine idea), you will also see NPCs treating you differently depending on which path you take. The more powerful you become in magic, the less effective you are at making technological items, and vice versa. You could, I suppose, split things evenly down the middle so you could have a pop at most things in the game, but you would end up as a half-arsed magician and a technical so-so, and never get any of the really powerful items. It makes sense then, to choose one path or the other. Later in the game you will visit towns that are heavily biased one way or the other. You will even get sent packing by towns that prefer magic if you've spent too much time tinkering about in the garage with gadgets and stuff like that.

This is what makes *Arcanum* very different to most of the RPGs you may have played: faction actually makes such a difference to how you play. You are constantly aware during every conversation you have and every transaction you make that your chosen path is directly affecting how people respond to you. There are other factors that can affect things (such as the persuasion skill), but if you are a mage in a techy town it doesn't matter what skills you have – they'll still tell you to sod off in certain places.

BRAVE NEW WORLD

Arcanum has many towns, and they are all very, very big. They all have a lot of people to meet, many of whom will give you quests or information or play their part in the main plot. If you've played *Planescape: Torment* and seen the size of the towns in it, we're talking about pretty much the same deal here. The characters you meet are not as interesting (or amusing) as the ones in *PT*, but they are still convincing and serve their purpose perfectly well. Most of the quests (particularly the ones that further the main plot) are well designed and some even branch out into sub-quests with intriguing twists in the storyline. You will often find yourself rushing to complete a particular quest just to see what happens next. It has to be said that *Arcanum*'s plot is not the most original one in the world: dwarves make steam engine, human nicks it and world goes mad, elves punish dwarves by banishing them into a void, hero (you) has to sort the whole mess out. But the way it's told is ingenious, and with many twists in the tale along the way and some very entertaining dialogue from the main plot characters, I can

"If you are a mage in a techy town it doesn't matter what skills you have – they'll still tell you to sod off in certain places"



One of the quests has you digging up graves, which is nice.

almost guarantee you will play the game to the end just to see how it all pans out.

That's not to say the core of the gameplay is lacking in any way. As an RPG it more than holds its own with the main competition, and the character development is second to none.

IN PERSPECTIVE

This is a slightly tricky one. It depends what you're after. *BG2* is better-looking than *Arcanum* and it has a better interface and a lot more spells. *Arcanum* is just as good as *BG2* bar the graphics and interface (and the fact you can't control development of the characters in your party) which all let it down a bit. *Planescape Torment*, needless to say, is better than both of them.

Arcanum

Planescape: Torment

Baldur's Gate

Once you get used to the interface and how everything works, you will constantly be amazed at all the different things you can do to change how your character plays the game. And combat, while initially the cause of great hilarity, is fairly competent once you start playing it how it should be played. Let me explain. There are three combat modes in *Arcanum*: real-time, turn-based, and fast turn-based. The default mode when the game starts is in real-time. Cue all combatants running about Benny Hill-style, thwacking each other on the head at about a million miles an hour while you look on with no clue whatsoever as to what's happening. It really is hilarious, and you should try it just once to see what I mean (though of course there is no way you could possibly play through the game that way). Turn-based works, but obviously it's a bit slow. Fast turn-based is the way ahead. Combat does not take forever in this mode, and you have plenty of time to control what's happening (and trust me you will need it when you get deep into the game). Things will get very tough, very fast, when the main plot starts to unfold. When this happens, you will be pretty happy about the fact that you are not on your own.

"Cue all combatants running about Benny Hill-style, thwacking each other on the head at about a million miles an hour"

FOLLOW ME

As you progress through the game you will meet people who join your party. These are called followers. You can get them by doing quests, or you might just bump into them hanging around or get them through the main storyline. Whatever way you get them, make sure you do get them. Virgil, the guy who starts with you at the beginning of the game, is a healer, and he's fairly handy to have around but unless your own character is a melee type, you're going to need a bit of muscle to get through battles without too much trouble. The only problem I had with the followers is you can't dictate how they develop in the game. For example, if your main character practices magic, it would be nice to have one of your party take the technological path so he/she could make weapons and effectively give you the best of both worlds. You can tailor your own character any way you like, but there's also an auto-level scheme option, which forces him down a certain path (like a Necromancer for example). It doesn't make sense that you can't do the same thing with your followers; it would solve so many problems in one fell swoop.

This may be irritating (or an oversight on the part of Troika),

CHARACTER BUILDING

Points make prizes. What do points make?

Each time you gain a level you get character points which you can use to develop your character. On the top right of the screen you can choose where you want to spend your points. In this example we're on the spell menu. There are 16 schools of magic, each with five spells. You're unlikely to learn every spell in each school, so make sure you know exactly which school of magic does what, so you don't spend character points on spells you never use. The same applies to technology: 16 schools of learning, each with six items to make. If you wish, you can put your points into improving your base stats instead, which will broaden your horizons greatly in terms of which areas of the game you can specialise in, but at the same time will restrict how far you can go in them. If, for example, you put a lot of points into strength, dexterity and melee, you won't have many left for any of the more interesting sides of magic or technology. You're best deciding at the start of the game whether you're going to choose magic, technology or to just build up a heavy duty melee fighter. Whichever you choose, stick to it, or you will miss out on the high-end parts of the game.



It pays to specialise.

WALKTHROUGH

END

DRAGON BEGONE

Some of the quests in *Arcanum* can be pretty complex and branch out in all directions. Most of them are pretty straightforward though, a bit like this one



1 A quiet town in *Arcanum*. Nothing much ever goes on round here. I think I'll go to the inn to see what's going down – inns are usually a good place to pick up a few quests.



2 This guy's a journalist. He's supposed to be taking a photo of a dragon, but he can't get close enough to take the pic and he's worried he might get sacked by his local rag.



3 Thanks to my teleportation spell, I don't have to walk to my destination. If you get no other spell in the game, make sure you get this one. It saves a lot of time traipsing about.



4 Here's the dragon. I have the journalist's camera and I've taken a pic, but while I'm here I may as well just kill him. Mission accomplished, another happy customer.



Dark Elf City. You don't want to be alone here at night.



Schematics: the art of combining two crap items to get one.



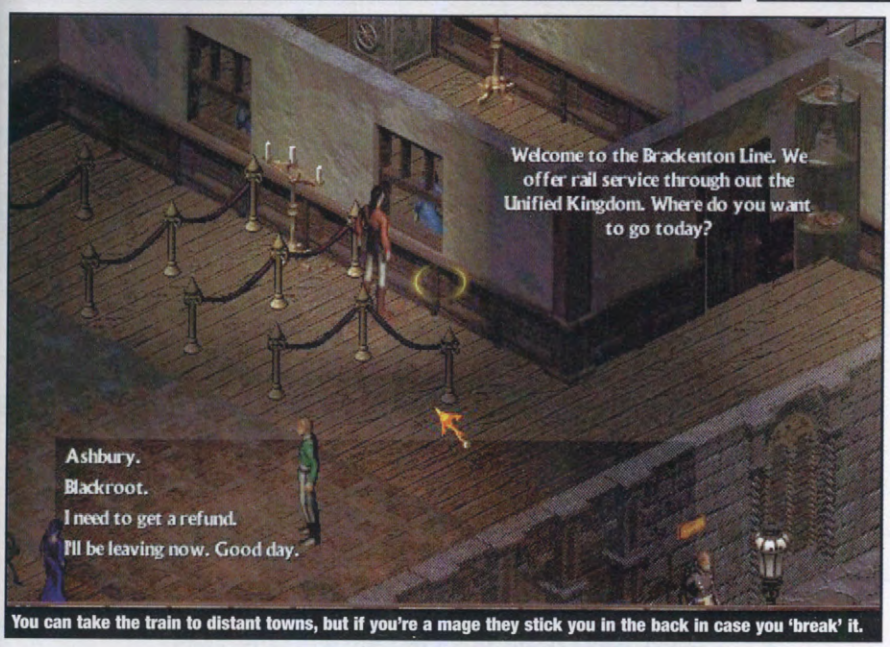
Gambling is integral if you don't want to be skint.



Elementals are pretty nasty. This one almost killed me, the git.



Key characters often send the plot in totally unexpected directions.



You can take the train to distant towns, but if you're a mage they stick you in the back in case you 'break' it.

but it does not mar the game to any great degree. Nor do the graphics, though at times they do their level best. *Arcanum* is no oil painting. In fact, most of you will find the graphical style very dated and even *Baldur's Gate II* (which is no work of art) looks spectacular by comparison. The only other gripe I have is that the interface is a bit cumbersome sometimes, and there is noticeable slowdown in some of the cities (which is strange since the graphics are not exactly pushing the envelope). But *Arcanum* is still an excellent game that will keep you highly entertained for a hell of a long time, and as such it deserves the attention of serious RPG fans pronto. PCZ

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM **Processor** Pentium 200 **Memory** 32Mb RAM **WE SAY** Forget it, it slows down on an Athlon 600 with 256 Mb RAM. You'll need a decent PIII for this

PCZVERDICT

UPPERS Very addictive • Highly flexible character development • Two distinctly different ways to play • Great plot

DOWNERS Terrible graphics, I mean, *really* bad • Interface is cumbersome in places • Characters in party develop outside of your control

84 It's no looker, but it has gameplay in spades

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BALDUR'S GATE II: THRONE OF BHAAL

£19.99 • Interplay • Out now

***Rhianna Pratchett* worships at the Throne Of Beard**

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

As gods (or fallen angels) go Bhaal definitely gets about a bit – he even made it into *Diablo II: Lord Of Destruction*, although he appears to have lost a 'h' along the way. As god of murder you'd think he'd be too busy indulging in the dark arts to engage in any between the sheets action, but no. You see, way back in the first *Baldur's Gate* you thought you were the only Bhaal offspring until you met your nemesis, who also happened to be your brother. Then in *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn* you found you had a little Bhaal sister.



Form an orderly queue boys, no pushing.

BRAND SPANKING NEW

Among the new features in *Throne Of Bhaal* are super-abilities for 20+ characters and ten new devastating spells for your higher level mages and clerics, including Bigby's Crunching Hand and the Wish spell. There are also a fair amount of magical weapons and items to be found. One of the most appealing aspects for dedicated players will be the new higher setting of the experience point capping, so characters can now reach up to level 40, which is as close to godlike as you can get.

Unfortunately there's only one new character kit to choose from, the Wild Mage, who comes with unpredictable surges of magical energy that can be helpful and harmful and even change the caster's gender. Personally I'd like to have seen more new character kits as they were one of the most enduring features of *BGII*.

"There are a number of elements that actually surpass the original *BGII*"

Now in this latest expansion pack, *Throne Of Bhaal*, the dramatic final few chapters of the phenomenal *Baldur's Gate* series, you find there are hundreds of the buggers running around the place, with all the Bhaalspawn intending to kill each other off for control of their father's throne.

The expansion pack picks up the storyline at the end of *BGII* and can be played separately or as an integrated part of the *BGII* game. *Throne Of Bhaal* starts with the most comprehensive party creation structure seen so far. Not only do you have the option of importing an old party, or creating a new one (stats will be automatically bumped up and you'll be provided with a goodie bag of nifty weaponry), you can also summon a character from *Shadows Of Amn* if you fancy a change. You'll also meet up with an old foe who offers to join your party, a tad surprising as you thought you'd offed him ages ago – not that death is any guarantee of a peaceful life in *Baldur's Gate*.

I DEDICATED MY LIFE TO BEARD

The expansion pack offers at least 30 hours of gameplay, depending on your dedication to the Church Of Beard, and with vast areas like the Watcher's Keep Dungeon to explore, it's definitely worth playing through a few times. In fact, there are a number of elements that actually surpass the original *BGII*, such as more realistic social environments where NPCs get on with their daily lives and the sheer number of epic battles. In fact, it's much more detailed, from the lushly rendered landscape to the kooky little things that BioWare likes to inject. At one point I'm sure I was attacked by a killer chinchilla, but that could just have been down to the combined effects of ProPlus and cheese string.

All in all *Throne Of Bhaal* is a flourishing finish to the Children of Bhaal saga and one that won't disappoint fans of the series. However, it's best to have a great deal of gameplay experience under your belt before attempting it because the battles are some of the most challenging ever seen in the *Baldur's Gate* world. PCZ

IN PERSPECTIVE

If it comes to a toss-up between the two, you're better off going with *Throne Of Bhaal* over *Icewind Dale*. Whereas *Planescape: Torment* (we promise to shut up about it someday soon) is the thinking man's top-notch RPG.

Throne of Bhaal

Planescape: Torment

Icewind Dale

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM **Processor** P233 **Memory** 32Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 8xCD ROM **WE SAY** PII 400 and a 3D card is what you need

PCZ VERDICT

UPPERS Vast territories to explore • Strong storyline • Packed with new bits 'n' pieces • Challenging

DOWNERS Only for experienced players • Could have done with more character kits

82 Best beards around



Lots of epic battles mean double the carnage.



Keep up the good work and we'll just cower in the corner.



A well aimed fire ball is a girl's best friend.



Plenty of new weapons to kit yourself out with.

DIABLO II: LORD OF DESTRUCTION

£19.99 • Vivendi • Out now

***Rhianna Pratchett* slips on her leather and gets ready to play**

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

Despite *PC ZONE* giving *Diablo II* a score of 72 per cent last year, it went on to sell millions. And as a self-confessed *Diablo II* fan, I can assure you that myself and the reviewer, Mr Hill, have had words over this.

For those of you who also enjoy being serenaded by the sound of blade meeting demon, the *Diablo II* expansion pack *Lord Of Destruction* is simply a way of prolonging the carnage. But is it really worth shelling out £19.99 for? It's the price of both *Baldur's Gate* and *Planescape: Torment*, or a slap-up Indian at my local takeaway with no skimping on the mango chutney. The answer is a resounding yes, so stuff those take-out menus behind the fridge for a few weeks and do a bit of *Diablo*-style damage.

Primarily the pack offers the fifth act, which takes place after you've killed Diablo, and involves the pursuit of Bhaal, the last of the prime evils. There are two new player characters, the Assassin and the Druid, and also a fair amount of new monsters. There's also new weaponry (including specialist equipment for each class), a bigger stash, the ability to have two weapon sets and thankfully some answers to a few age-old problems. In addition, the new support for 800x600 resolution makes the experience all the more pleasurable.

Both new characters are quite impressive and put the existing five to shame. The Druid, which looks a bit like Paul Presley on steroids during the pre-haircut years, summons wolves, poisonous vines and ravens to his side to fight, harnesses the power of the elements and can even shape-shift himself into a werewolf. The Assassin is a dangerous lady, in fact, she can almost be accused of being too powerful at times. Instead of casting spells, she relies on the powers of the mind and body to harness her martial art skills, and use of shadow disciplines and traps. Unique to the Assassin is the ability to charge up skills, which takes a bit of time, but produces a devastating effect.

> **"The Druid, which looks a bit like Paul Presley during the pre-haircut years, can even shape-shift himself into a werewolf"**

Both new characters are fun to play – Druids in particular cause a lot of on-screen pandemonium and when they group together it looks like a scene straight out of *The Jungle Book*. The new act is beautifully constructed, and deposits you in the middle of a raging battlefield where the barbarian hordes and the minions of Bhaal are fighting it out. With only six quests it's a tad on the short side, but the music – which is so easily neglected by the average gamer – is hauntingly beautiful. Someone oboed for 18 hours to make your gaming experience more enjoyable you bastards.

Blizzard has also introduced a number of tweaks to the original characters. This is in order to level out the playing field a bit more, but when did we ever have to play fair? These include adjusting the damage potential of Amazon's strafe arrow and the casting speed of the Sorceress. This has caused friction online as the tweaks have also been forced onto existing *DII* players via a patch, so players have found that the kick-ass character they've worked on for ages are no longer as kick-ass as they thought.

I'd like to be more sympathetic to the whiners, but they seem to have forgotten half the fun is getting there. What Blizzard has done is not only give us a better selection of characters to choose from, but also given the existing characters more dimensions and the chance to build them further with the increased difficulty in the nightmare and hell modes. So what if they require a slightly different style of play? Bite the bullet and pull yourself out of the dirt like the rest of us. PCZ

IN PERSPECTIVE

A great value expansion pack akin to *Tales Of The Sword Coast*. If you fancy a bit more hack-and-slash action, *Severance* should be your first port of call. Then again, you might want to go for a more intelligent RPG, in which case there's no beating *Planescape: Torment*.

Diablo II: Lord Of Destruction

Planescape: Torment

Tales Of The Sword Coast

Severance: Blade Of Darkness

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM **Processor** P233 **Memory** 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 4 x CD-ROM **WE SAY** PIII with 128Mb RAM would be better

PCZ VERDICT

UPPERS Impressive new characters give the game added longevity • Supports a greater resolution • Atmospheric music

DOWNERS New act too short • Character tweaks will cause frustration

83 Devilishly good fun



Carnage and destruction, with you in the middle.



"Oh come on Sebastian, blue is so last season. And where's your beard?"



The wings 'n' things annual party gets a tad out of hand.



"Is that your wolf or mine."

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The Dominion missions are much harder. Gizmo must have thought people would only want to play them after completing the Federation campaign.

STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE DOMINION WARS

£29.99 • Pan Interactive • Out now

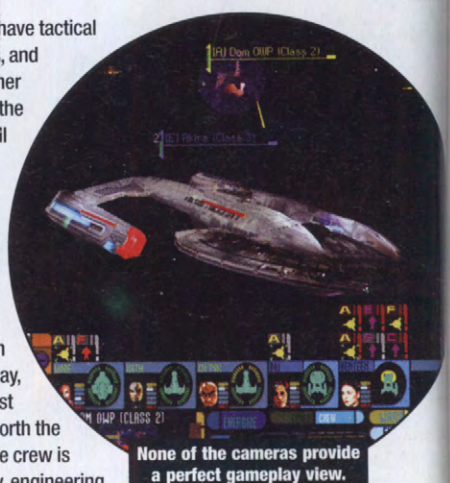
Mark Hill gets upset if you call him a Trekkie. He goes and hides under his Seven of Nine duvet cover

Deep Space Nine was usually made up of two types of episodes. The first were tedious character-based stories swathed in sentimentality, like the ones where Odo moped after Kira and turned into goo, the repellent Jake Sisko went off to war to report on the atrocities and was confronted by his own cowardice or when Dr Bashir fell in love with yet another crippled/diseased alien. Then, in the last two series of the show, Paramount must have given the creators some extra cash for special effects, and the other kind of episodes started to appear. Magnificent space battles pitting entire fleets of Federation starships against waves of Dominion vessels. Political intrigue, with alliances and back stabbings every other week, as the Klingons joined the Feds and the Cardassians joined the Jem'Hadar. And in the middle of it all, the DS9 space station. These are the episodes *Dominion Wars* tries to recreate, and while the result is an interesting mix of action and tactics, it fails to do so.

CREW CUT

Although similar to both *Star Trek: Armada* and *Starfleet Command*, *Dominion Wars* is essentially a squad-based real-time strategy game. It proudly announces on its box that it features no resource gathering and no base building, which, depending on your preference, may or may not be a bonus. I know I prefer not to fiddle with factories, refineries and the rest of it. Here, you can concentrate on the best tactical way to approach each mission and micromanage each individual ship. At the start of each mission you have a limited number of credits to spend on ships, captains and crew. Captains have tactical and command skills, and experience. The higher these numbers are, the better your ships will respond and the more manoeuvres you'll be able to pull off. Since they gain experience after each mission, it's possible to build up each character in an *X-COM* kind of way, although for the most part it's not really worth the effort. The rest of the crew is divided into security, engineering and command. But these are just numbers that enhance performance, repair faster, repel invasions or board enemy vessels. They are effectively nameless redshirts you never get to see or care about.

> **"You can concentrate on the best tactical way to approach each mission and micromanage each individual ship"**



None of the cameras provide a perfect gameplay view.

You can choose to play as the *Federation* or *Dominion*, and in both cases the missions follow the episodes from those last two series of *DS9* and are strictly linear. The first Federation ones


The Deep Space Nine station doesn't look quite as impressive as it should.



Sisko is expensive. Save him for later missions.



You can import your own ships from Starship Creator: Warp II. If you're very, very sad.



You can control from two to five ships in the early missions and more than ten in the later ones.

are so easy you can win them without knowing what you're doing. Which is useful when you bear in mind how confusing the interface is. It's not quite as complex as the one in *Starfleet Command*, but there is still a lot of information and a lot of options on display. There's a scaled down map of the level, ship stats (shields, hull, weapons etc), crew left, speed controls and, most importantly, tactical controls. Here you can set your shields, divert power to other systems, guard other ships or order evasive manoeuvres. You can also choose the type of attacks, like hit and runs, and target certain enemy subsystems (engine, weapons...). Once you've mastered all this you can start employing some really sneaky tactics and, by the third Federation mission, you really need them.

SPACE VACUUM

This third mission has you controlling the Defiant and entering enemy space in an effort to disable a sensor array. Because this is the only Fed ship able to cloak, you have to go in alone. The all-action strategy won't work here and you soon realise you need to decloak at the right moments and pick off ships one by one. However, this involves much waiting around while your shields regenerate as it does smart decision-making.

"There are no cut-scenes, save the opening and ending ones, and nothing unexpected happens mid-mission"

There are some excellent ideas for some of the later missions. In one, for example, you have to rescue the maquis Thomas Riker (that's the alternate Riker, for all you non-fans) from a Cardassian ship transporting him to execution. This entails taking out the guarding vessels and beaming a team aboard to transport him back. The problem, and this is something that affects the whole game, is it does nothing to involve you with the story. Unless you watch an episode and then play the corresponding mission, you could be playing just any average space strategy. There is no sense of drama, nothing to connect you with what's going on. Sure, the mission briefings are full of plot and intrigue, but once you're out there it's a case of click on your ship and direct it. There are no cut-scenes, save the opening and ending ones, and nothing unexpected happens mid-mission (as it often did in *Armada*). There aren't even many recognisable voices. If you play as the Federation you have Admiral Ross (whoop-dee-doo) and as the Dominion you have Gul Dukat and, occasionally, Weyoun – voiced by the brilliant Jeffrey Combs from *Re-Animator* and *The Frighteners*. But even they only appear in briefings.

Don't be fooled by the 3D engine either. You still have to move your ship on a 2D plane limited by invisible boundaries. Add to this a few irritating bugs (see side panel) and you have yet another disappointing use of the *Star Trek* licence. PCZ

SPACE BUGS

Released too early?

The game came out in the US a few weeks before it came out here. It was so bugged, developer Gizmo released a patch a few days later. The version in the UK shops is the patched one but, as a glance at the *Dominion Wars* online message board shows, there are still problems. Miscellaneous crashes, save games not working and AI disappearing. I experienced some of these problems, with the added nuisance that I couldn't use the keyboard to move the camera.

There are also some gameplay bugs. I found in some of the missions you could position yourself at a certain angle and fire at enemy ships without getting shot yourself. It's a bit like those footy games where the ball always goes in if you shoot from a certain point. There should be a second patch out soon, but we doubt it will fix everything. At least Gizmo is working hard to rectify its mistakes, but should the release have been delayed a couple of months?

IN PERSPECTIVE

Less complex than *SCII* and lacking the dull resource management of *Armada* (but also the well-told story), *Dominion Wars* is a bit like a third-person *Klingon Academy*. But we're still waiting for the definitive *Star Trek* strategy game.

Dominion Wars

Starfleet Command II

Klingon Academy

Star Trek: New Worlds

Star Trek: Armada

TECH SPECS

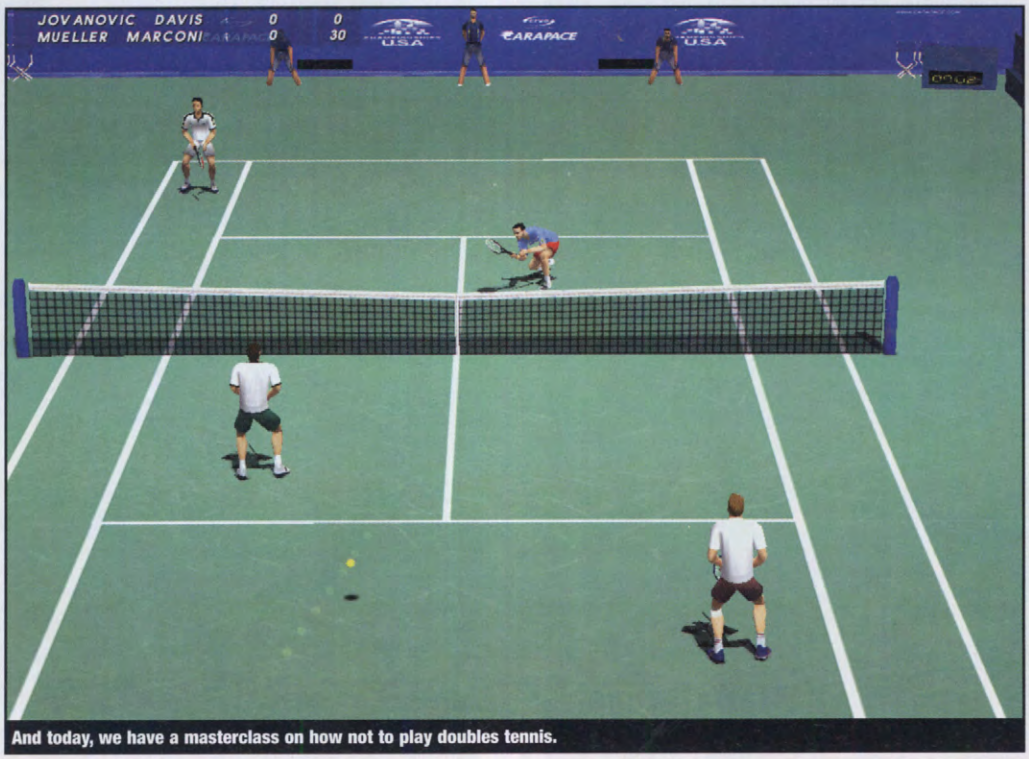
MINIMUM SYSTEM **Processor** P266 **Memory** 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 8Mb 3D card **WE SAY** P350 with 128Mb and 16Mb 3D card

PCZ VERDICT

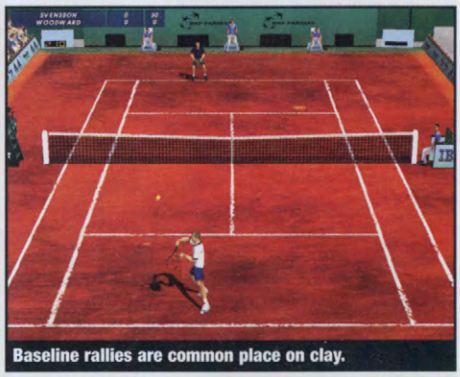
UPPERS Massive battles • Good looking ships • Tactics over resource gathering

DOWNERS No involvement • Bugged • 2D battlegrounds

64 Spiritless space tactics



And today, we have a masterclass on how not to play doubles tennis.


Baseline rallies are common place on clay.


"I could beat you standing on one leg."

ROLAND GARROS FRENCH OPEN 2001

£19.99 • Cryo • Out now

Considering *Martin Korda* hasn't picked up a tennis racquet for nearly five years, he seems to suffer from tennis elbow rather too often for comfort. Strange that...

By the time you read this, Wimbledon will be nothing more than a distant memory. I'm guessing that the Brits were as crap as usual, probably losing to some unheard of Ukranian who still uses a wooden racquet. To be honest though, the inevitable disappointment of watching England's nearly men capitulating in front of a futilely expectant crowd won't be the biggest tennis related disappointment of the summer. Oh no, that dubious title goes to this shameless rehash of the finest tennis game ever to grace the PC, *Open Tennis 2000*. Incredibly, developer Carapace has somehow managed to remake the same game and make it slightly worse, to the point where it now carries more bugs than a cheap whore's crotch.

NEW BALLS

Before I embark on a rant of MacEnroesque proportions though, it's worth noting that *RG2001* is still a quality title, and as a multiplayer game, ranks among one of the best sports games on the PC. For starters, the control system is superb, if initially a bit tricky. Move towards the ball and press one of the shot buttons (slice or top spin). Then, as you approach the ball, choose where to place your shot with the marker that appears on your opponent's side of the court. The quicker you get to the ball, the more time you have to aim your return. Simple, eh?

Multiplayer options include singles, doubles and mixed games for up to four people crammed around one computer. Each of the four surfaces (grass, synthetic, clay and hard) require a totally different strategy, with serve and volley tactics best for grass, and baseline hammering the way to play on clay. The ball physics are, for the most part, also very accurate. An umpire keeps score and you can take part in one of four tournaments including the eponymous French Open. There's also plenty of attention to detail around the court and some excellent crowd sound effects.

"Multiplayer options include singles, double and mixed games for up to four people"

FAULT

OK, that's more than enough of that, because we saw all of this last year. You see, what will really rile you is that there are no real improvements to speak of from 12 months ago. The AI is marginally better, but still far too easy to beat even on the hardest level, and it's unlikely to take you more than a few hours before you've worked out how to outsmart it. You're provided with a selection of 16 fictional players of each sex, each with varying abilities, and a choice of racquets, which are a complete waste of time as it's equally easy to beat the computer no matter which one you use. Add to this the fact that the players still run with the same Neanderlithic gate as in *OT2000*, which makes them look like they're constantly stumbling as well as the fact that their arms are longer than a baboon's, and you start to wonder whether anything worthwhile has actually changed.

DOUBLE FAULT

It gets worse. All these rehashed faults are compounded by the lack of LAN and Internet mulitplayer options. "Yes Martin," they assured me last year, "There'll definitely be LAN and Internet play in this version, guaranteed." Well there's not. Anywhere. I looked in every menu, read the manual twice (once backwards) and even visited the official website **www.internet-tennis.com** (which didn't work), in a desperate bid to find some Internet options. There may well be a multiplayer patch in the future, but that's not good enough. Whoever decided to exclude these options from the retail copy deserves to be tied naked to a tennis net, and have their furry spheres pummelled mercilessly with a racquet strung with razor wire. Shame on you.

Roland Garros 2001 is a good game – outstanding in multiplayer – but it's the same as before. Only more bugged. Carapace has wasted a glorious opportunity. Shame on them indeed. PCZ

IN PERSPECTIVE

Here's what to do if you want to choose between this and the only other worthwhile tennis game on the PC, *Open Tennis 2000*. As they're almost identical (*RG2001* has slightly better AI and a couple of extra tweaks, *OT2000* has fewer bugs), simply cut out this bit of the page, close your eyes and stick a pin on the paper. There you go, decision made.



TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM **Processor** PII 300 **Memory** 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 8MB 3D card **WE SAY** PIII 500 with a16Mb 3D card

PCZ VERDICT

UPPERS Superb 2-4 player multiplayer gameplay • Slightly improved AI • Generally realistic gameplay and physics • Excellent control system

DOWNERS Unchallenging AI • No LAN or Internet options • Bugged • Rubbish replays • Mincing players • Far too similar to *Open Tennis 2000*

78 Pretty much the same game with a different name



HOOOOOOOWWWWWWWZAT? Sorry, it had to be said.



The one-day internationals feature suitably attired players.



The third umpire gives his decision, and the batsman walks.

INTERNATIONAL CRICKET CAPTAIN – THE ASHES EDITION 2001

£19.99 • Empire Interactive • Out now

Steve Hill grips his handle and steps up to the crease

With the weather refusing to commit itself, we are left only with the gnawing lack of football and the numbing prevalence of cricket to validate that summer is actually here. Further verification comes from the timely release of Empire's perennial Pimms and pavilion affair, this latest incarnation conveniently coinciding with the historic Ashes series, in which England is traditionally humbled by a bunch of barbie loving colonials.

As any fool knows, the best thing about cricket is the music. You know the one we mean, and even if you have no interest in cricket whatsoever, it's difficult not to turn up the volume and revel in its gleeful exuberance. The tune is *Soul Limbo* by Booker T & The MGs, and it's commendably included here. A superb start then, and one that is indicative of the authenticity of the game, which also comes with the endorsement of Wisden, the long-established cricket watcher's bible

NORMAN WISDEN

Before we waste any more of your time, we should point out that this is by no means an arcade game.

"It can't be fooled, and victory requires solid tactics and concentration. Suffice to say we couldn't even win the toss"

With the possible exception of *Match Of The Day*, there is no more rousing sports theme tune than that which has traditionally accompanied televised cricket. If you're expecting to control a poorly animated cricketer and thrash about wildly with a bat, we're sure that EA Sports will be able to provide you with something along those lines. *International Cricket Captain* is more concerned with management of the team, and as such enables you to watch poorly animated cricketers instead. We might as well get the graphical jibes out of the way now: no, the screenshots aren't corrupted, yes, it does look like a Commodore 64 game.

However, this doesn't particularly detract from the playability, as the graphics are there simply to enable you to watch the highlights, or otherwise, of your innings. Allied to the soothing tones of the BBC's Jonathan Agnew, and some mildly convincing crowd noises, it's adequate. The attention to detail also becomes apparent, with players saluting half-centuries and so on, and even the third umpire being called in for particularly close decisions.

BAT & BALL

As for interaction, the field can be arranged to any formation you choose, either preset or one of your own design. Bowlers can be selected, and the length and position of their 'throw' decided. In theory, a more aggressive approach will yield more wickets, but risk giving away more runs. Conversely, a defensive stance will offer limited opportunities for either. As for batting, it's slightly less involving, with only the aggression of each batsman variable, although this can be adapted to particular bowlers.

And guess what? It's a strangely compelling experience, despite the fact that there's an overriding feeling that you are not so much playing the game, as simply keeping an eye on it. However, it can't be fooled, and victory requires solid tactics and concentration. Suffice to say, we couldn't even win the toss.

There is a wealth of statistics to take in, with an in-depth career mode that will keep cricket fans off the streets for months. In some ways, *ICC* is as close as cricket games come to *Championship Manager*. Unfortunately, it's not quite close enough. PCZ

IN PERSPECTIVE

There isn't a great deal to differentiate between previous *ICC* games and this one, although cricket buffs will relish the updated information.

International Cricket Captain – The Ashes Edition 2001

International Cricket Captain

International Cricket Captain 2

International Cricket Captain 2000

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM **Processor** P133 **Memory** 16Mb RAM **WE SAY** You can't buy a PC that won't be able to run this

PCZ VERDICT

UPPERS Authentic title music • Genuine data • Perversely playable

DOWNERS Limited interaction • Ancient graphics

66 Good, but not worth a pitch invasion



Would you feel safe in a ship this unsteady?



And they said it would never fly.



This can't be good.

ECHELON

£29.99 • Akaei • Out August

It was a time of war. The future's in trouble again and *Paul Presley*'s the only man who can save it. Ah well, nice knowing you all...

About five years ago I waxed lyrical about a little known underwater action game called *Archimedian Dynasty*. It arrived straight out of nowhere, was developed deep in the heart of Germany and, despite being one of the best games of 1996, was roundly ignored by everyone.

I learnt two lessons that day. First of all, we in the videogaming journalistic world tend to greatly overestimate our own importance in the grand scheme of things, assuming that the nation's button-fiddlers and joystick-gropers are hanging on our every word, treating every half-page review of a flight sim add-on like the Sermon on the Mount. Secondly, I learnt never to underestimate any quietly-released, under-budgeted East-European/ex-Soviet Bloc-developed action game. Where others will look at the words "Made by the second largest programming team in the Bratislovian Republic" on the accompanying photocopied press release and raise their eyes skyward, I'll gladly snatch the disc from their grasp, ready to embrace a new dawn in videogaming should it lie within.

Echelon is a futuristic action flight sim jobbie, developed by MADia – Russia's answer to Lionhead Studios, I suppose – and at first glance it really looks like we're onto another underrated classic here.

DOSVYDANA, PERESTROIKA, GLASNOST

Indeed, at first glance *Echelon* looks utterly superb, drawing the player in with one of the best looking pieces of FMV I've seen on a PC for a long while. This is then backed up by possibly the second finest looking piece of FMV I've seen on a PC for a long time at the start of the game's main campaign. This is only slightly jarred by the constantly repeating theme tune that bizarrely seems to have been lifted straight out of *Lock, Stock & Two Smoking Barrels* for some reason.

The game proper is also pretty impressive looking, providing you've got the hardware to cope and you don't mind some persistent fogging in the backgrounds. In fact, technically this is a nice job all round. The graphics engine is complemented by a good flight model – just simple enough to appeal to twitchy action fans, but with enough interesting quirks to emphasise the point that this is the future and things aren't as straightforward as they seem. Basically, fighters behave like a mutant hybrid of helicopters and planes, allowing for some interesting dogfights as ships swoop and bank then spin around on an axis to shoot at whatever's behind them.

Interestingly, different ship classes have different levels of handling too. Fighters are fast and nimble, while bombers really feel heavy and sluggish and take a great deal of persistence to fly well. Transports lumber about like elephants with wings, while interceptors work much better at long distance engagements than up-close shoot-outs.

TOSVARICH, STOLI, ER... NYET

Which is cue for some background I suppose. It's the usual future-strife malarkey. Mankind colonises the galaxy. Gets too big for his own boots. Colonies break off and fight among themselves. Nukes turn most of the habitable planets into irradiated balls of dirt. Mankind rebuilds. New era of peace. Old bunch of colonists turn up and start trouble. Mankind plunges back into war, this time with a common enemy. I think Shakespeare first wrote that one didn't he?

Your role is simple enough. You're a trainee pilot on Earth. A couple of training missions to familiarise yourself with the controls and then you're off. Fighting a war across one particular planet. For 50 or so missions.

Which is the first of *Echelon*'s limitations. While it looks great and all, flying over the similar looking canyons time and time again does start to grate. Every once in a while you wish that you

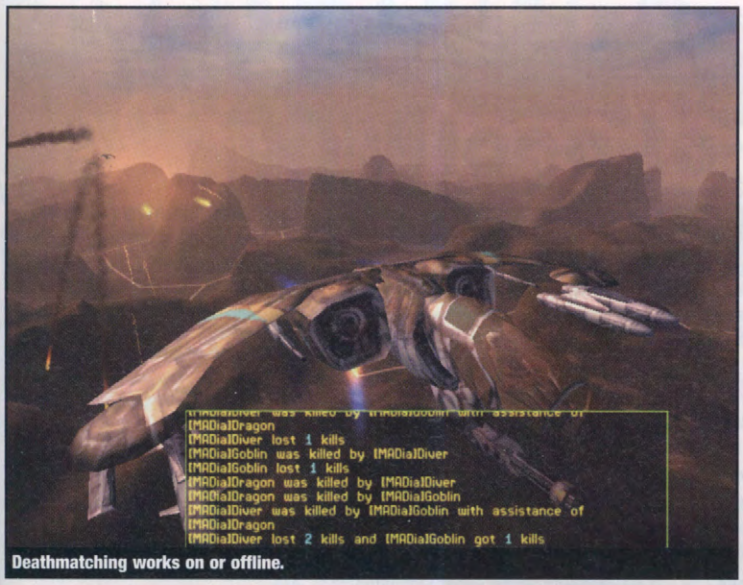
IN PERSPECTIVE

Echelon owes a lot to the *Wing Commander* school of design. If you want to head into space for your shooting thrills, we'd recommend *FreeSpace 2*. Of course, if you can find it anywhere, I'd still recommend *Archimedian Dynasty*.

Echelon

FreeSpace 2

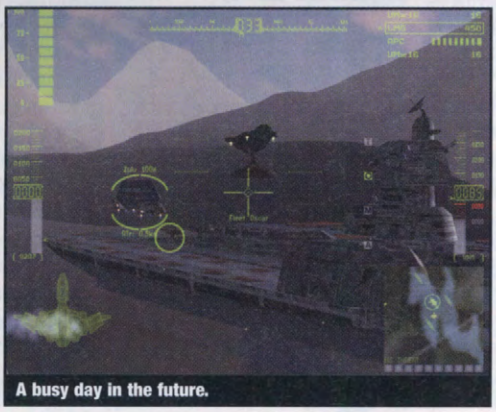
Archimedian Dynasty



Deathmatching works on or offline.


Some of the larger ships have rear turrets.


There are more than 50 missions to test yourself against.


A busy day in the future.


This reminds me of *X-Wing Alliance*.

could take the action into space (as seen in the FMV intro). Failing that, just flying somewhere green would be nice of pace, rather than the murky orange/brown that covers the world like a blanket of vomited snow.

The missions help to add variety, although, as they range in difficulty from the mildly impossible to the superhumanly insane, and the fact that they're scripted rather than being dynamic, you'll find you end up playing a large number of them over and over again until boredom settles in like an old grandparent in a favourite armchair.

The debate about mid-game saves is raging elsewhere in the industry. But making a case for their defence, is the fact that as number of *Echelon*'s missions are long, having to play through them again and again because of a small error near the end, is enough to make even the most mild mannered gamer want to jab fork handles into nearby pedestrians.

DA, BITTE (THAT'S GERMAN – ED.), BONJOUR (YOU'RE FIRED – ED.)

Echelon does a lot right. Visually superb, with really exciting dogfights and missions that conjure up a believable sense of large military operations. Unfortunately, it also gets several key areas slightly wrong. The difficulty is too high, the missions and landscape become repetitive and the linear nature to it all, destroys any real sense of atmosphere. The subtle hints towards humour in the mission debriefings should really have been fleshed out to increase the sense of characterisation and immersion into the world. A few more FMVs to make the player care about what was going on would help (especially when they're of this quality), and more involvement in the planning stages would have helped no end.

"It's visually superb, with exciting dogfights and missions that conjure up a believable sense of large military operations"

Still, *Echelon* can be a lot of fun if you're patient enough to live with the annoyances. There's an absolute classic screaming to get out underneath it all, so hopefully MADia will be able to address these issues in any later releases. It's not the best thing to come out of the new East European landscape (cheap vodka and Sylvia Saint still hold those crowns), but it does enough to justify my faith in looking at the games others fear to touch. Rock on comrades. PCZ

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM: Processor PII 266, **Memory** 64Mb RAM **WE SAY** At first it looks like a minimum spec machine will do, but you'll soon realise that speeds of 800MHz and RAM in the hundreds are mandatory

PCZ VERDICT

UPPERS Fast and furious • Looks nice indeed • Superb FMVs (albeit only four of them) • Nice sense of scale

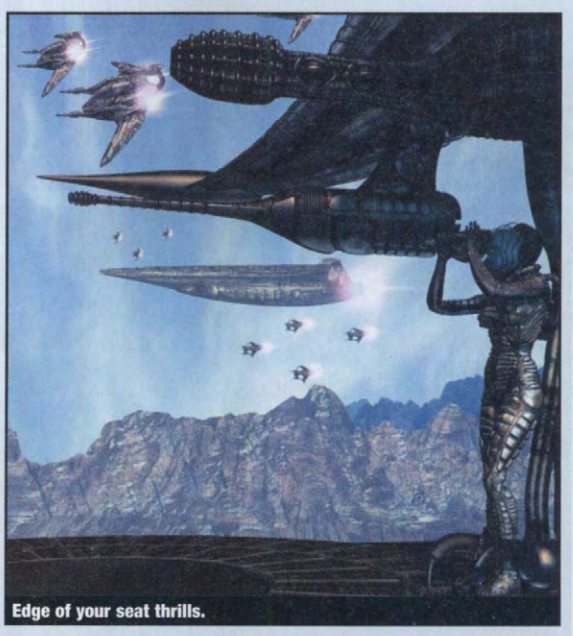
DOWNERS The single landscape can get repetitive after a while • Very, very tough • Lacking in co-op missions

77 A nice little number

OUR FEATURE PRESENTATION

Showing on a monitor near you now

Just a quick note to once again praise the quality of the FMVs in *Echelon*. It's so rare we get a decent pre-game movie to sink our teeth into as everyone these days seems to be eschewing them in favour of in-game engine scripts and the like. Nice to see that the old-skool can still pull it off every once in a while.


Edge of your seat thrills.

MICROSOFT TRAIN SIMULATOR

£49.99 • Microsoft • Out now

Chuffeter-chuff. Chuffeter-chuff. Woo-woo! *Paul Presley* lives out someone else's boyhood fantasies

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

This is a first. I honestly fell asleep while playing this game. I don't know whether it was just me suffering from a long day or the realism of the sim, but as I sat there watching my diesel locomotive thunder down a straight track I began to drift off, only to be jolted awake as the train went headfirst into a buffer post and crashed. And do you know what? Just for a moment I couldn't tell if it was real or not.

SILVER STREAK

First of all, let me reassure any doubters. I'm not about to criticise *Train Simulator* for actually being a simulator of trains. The argument over the merits of trainspotting is for another time and place. The basic fact of the matter is that as train simulations go, this is as comprehensive a package as you could ask for. Hauling cargo, passenger manifests, long distance runs or short hops between local stations – it's all here and it works a treat.

"There's an undeniable thrill about pulling the whistle cord on the Flying Scotsman as you hurtle through the countryside"

Plus, it looks, sounds and feels lovely. The attention to detail is superb and, cliched as it is, there's an undeniable thrill about pulling the whistle cord on the Flying Scotsman as you hurtle through the English countryside. Technically there's no faulting it. Perhaps a little more detail when things go wrong and maybe a 'free ride' mode that wasn't so empty of computer AI, but otherwise not too bad at all.

If there is a real criticism to be had though, it's that for the casual player there may not seem to be much variety in the long-term. The activities provide some interesting diversions and there's quite a bit of scenery to explore, but the bottom line is, once you've mastered the controls (which doesn't take long), the mechanics of one train journey are pretty much the same as another. For the train enthusiast though, what's provided in the box is just the start of a much larger journey…

IN PERSPECTIVE

Er… you're kidding, right?

Microsoft Train Simulator

Crossing An RMT Picket Line

Standing by the track in the cold with a notebook and a thermos filled with orange cordial fervently wishing that the old man in the cagool 20 yards to the left would stop looking at you in that odd way

RIDING THE RAILS

Whether or not *Train Simulator* will be a success isn't down to the talents of British developer Kuju Entertainment though. As with Microsoft's *Flight Simulator* series, the game's longevity will depend on first and third party support. The included editing software should provide enough encouragement, although the route editor seems overly cumbersome to use.

Hopefully, we'll start seeing new routes, new trains and new activities before long (there's already an Internet community growing and I've even seen a London Underground route ready for downloading). Software of this quality deserves a chance after all. Should it happen then there's no reason why *Train Sim* can't be as popular as a flight simulator. There are far more people with model train sets in their attic than model planes after all. PCZ

TECH SPECS

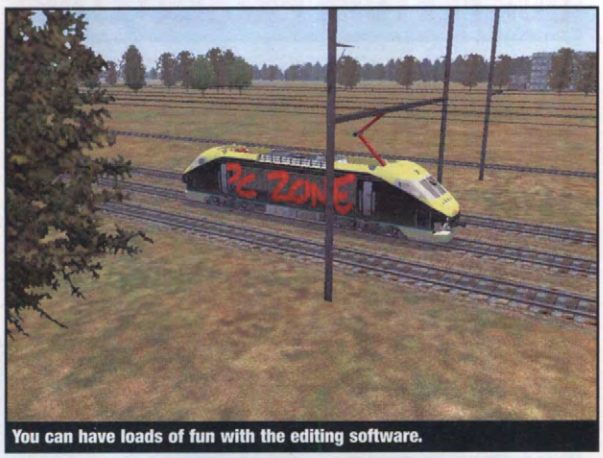
MINIMUM SYSTEM **Processor** PII 266MHz **Memory** 32Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 500Mb disc space **WE SAY** Nope. Not a chance in hell. Memory in the hundreds, processors in the PIII range and a top-end graphics card or you might as well be playing with one of those badly-painted wooden train sets your elderly aunt used to buy you at Christmas from a car boot sale

PCZ VERDICT

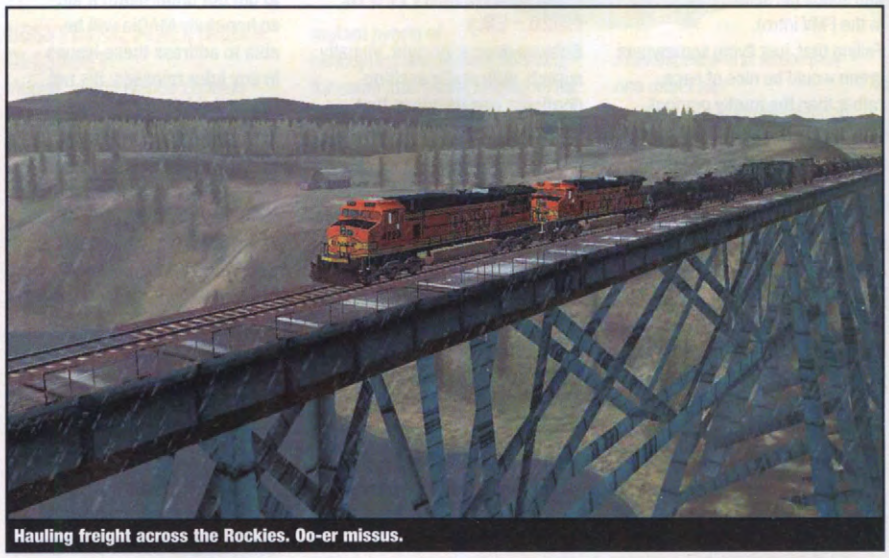
UPPERS The trains are realistically modelled • The scenery is superb • The atmosphere is pretty true to life (it made me doze off after all)

DOWNERS Variety is lacking for the casual player • Could do with more warnings when things go wrong

80 A great way to kick off the genre



You can have loads of fun with the editing software.


Hauling freight across the Rockies. Oo-er missus.


The easiest job in the world. His, not mine.


Just imagine the crammed in Japanese commuters.


Oh dear.

FEED YOUR PHONE! WITH

No.1 for Ring-tones and logo's

logo-to-go.com™

Ringtones now available for **Motorola** & **Sagem**

LOOK LOOK

Just call the number for a logo or tone and within a few minutes it'll be sent to your phone!

Sport

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SAVE CHIP	3073		9004
Ireland	9017		9011
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2730 Backstreet • More Than That

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THE INCREDIBLE MACHINE: EVEN MORE CONTRAPTIONS

£9.99 • Vivendi • Out now

James Lyon regularly gets small animals to perform for him. The sicko

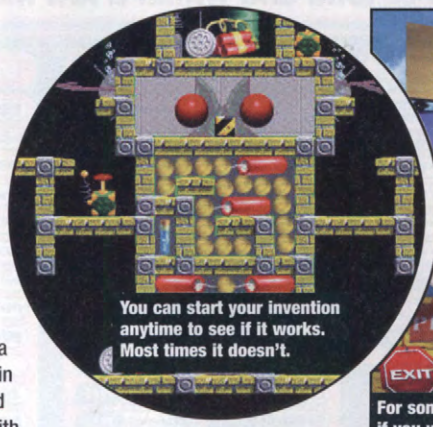
There have been numerous *Incredible Machine* games before this, but for those who have so far managed to avoid their charms it's best to start with a bit of an explanation. Simply take a disparate set of objects (fans, mice, monkeys on bicycles, etc) and connect them together in such a way as to complete a certain task. Say, getting a ball into a hole by dropping a bucket onto a mouse-wheel to make it run to a lamp to nudge a dog to crash a car to injure a girl to bring the doctor to fall in love to steal my girlfriend. Bastard! 13 per cent.

LET'S START AGAIN

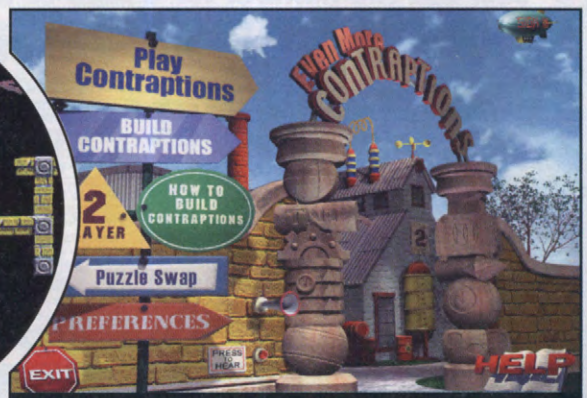
In the puzzle genre, its logistics veer towards the other end of the spectrum from the likes of *Tetris*. In fact, if you want a modern-day comparison it's actually more like *Commandos*. No, really. Ignoring the lack of real-time planning, it takes the same method of utilising a variety of individual tools to produce a fully formed result. Even though the path through your task is essentially limited, there's (slight) room to manoeuvre, to develop different tactics in a linear solution. While each puzzle has parts that fit together obviously – fire lights fireworks, ropes are tied to balloons – there's scope for a degree of experimentation, meaning you sometimes don't need to use the same pieces in the same order as the official solution.

There are 210 levels plus a helpful 50 tutorials, playable in any order. And while easy and medium can be completed with no problems in a day or so, the difficult and expert levels are going to take a while longer. Or if, like me, your grasp of physics extends as far as knowing that gravity stops the sky falling down, a good deal longer than that. Even when supplied only with what you need, some tasks initially look impossible and are often only solved by manipulating pieces previously thought to be incompatible.

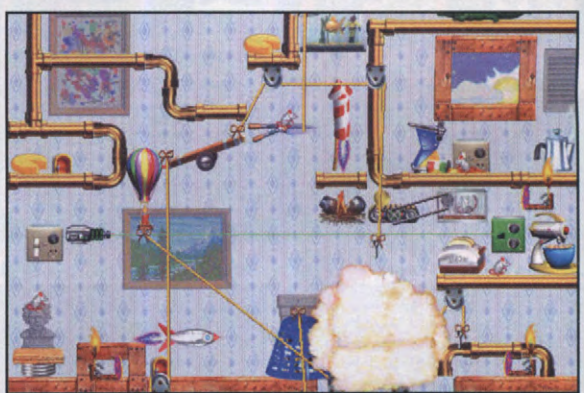
Presentation appears well-polished, although the over-enthusiastic American voice (amazingly for this type of game, it's not ein stereotypical German vacky provezzor) may grate after a while. Rather annoying, though, is selecting parts on screen. Draw the cursor over something and it'll helpfully highlight it, but it won't always be the piece you want and you then have to pull out the pointer and try and carefully penetrate your intended part. It's particularly irksome when trying to manipulate gears inside belts. Mind you, this is a problem that plagues the original too.



You can start your invention anytime to see if it works. Most times it doesn't.



For some reason you have to return all the way to the main menu if you want to try another puzzle.



Even this game manages to wedge in explosions.



Absolutely incredible!



If in doubt, just place everything randomly.

"If you want a modern-day comparison it's actually more like *Commandos*. No, really"

Presentation appears well-polished, although the over-enthusiastic American voice (amazingly for this type of game, it's not ein stereotypical German vacky provezzor) may grate after a while. Rather annoying, though, is selecting parts on screen. Draw the cursor over something and it'll helpfully highlight it, but it won't always be the piece you want and you then have to pull out the pointer and try and carefully penetrate your intended part. It's particularly irksome when trying to manipulate gears inside belts. Mind you, this is a problem that plagues the original too.

OH NO! MORE CONTRAPTIONS

EMC faces the same problems *Lemmings: Revolution* did. After an endless procession of sequels, it's still nothing more than the original polished up for the modern market. What makes this worse is that it is also an add-on pack to an earlier title. The puzzles may be new, but there's only so much you can do with the idea before you start coming back on yourself. The only real direction to go now is probably 3D. Fans of the original or its sequels are going to feel mildly miffed as there's nothing intrinsically new in here. Which isn't to say it's a bad game for *TIM* virgins. The concept of physical action/reaction puzzling offers a pleasurably sedate experience for those of a logical persuasion. And given it's only a tenner, it's good value indeed. Nevertheless, if you've played the previous game, avoid this, as it's probably only worth 47 per cent if you've already got its predecessor. However, if you've yet to experience an *Incredible Machine* game, then its fiendish puzzles should keep you gripped for a good few weeks. PCZ

IN PERSPECTIVE

We compared this to *Mindrover* in an earlier issue, but *EMC*'s a lot more accessible to non-engineers. *Commandos* is alright. But, then, you could compare it to *Lemmings* also. Oh, when's it all going to end?

The Incredible Machine

EMC

Commandos

Lemmings (original)

Mindrover

TECH SPECS

TECH SPECS **Processor** P90 **Memory** 32Mb 175 HD space maximum **WE SAY** Slow in loading but playable

PCZ VERDICT

UPPERS Cheap • A wealth of levels • Shiny graphics

DOWNERS No major improvements on an old idea • Fiddly and annoying auto-highlight

72 Same old, same old fun

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G108XPCD

DRAGONRIDERS: CHRONICLES OF PERN

£29.99 • Ubi Soft • Out now

Ever wanted to star in your very own Anne McCaffrey novel? Neither has *Mark Hill*



"Remember children: a dragon is for life not just for Christmas."

We should have kept our bloody mouths shut. After all those years of predicting the untimely demise of adventure games and boldly claiming we'd seen the last of them around 1998, our words are coming back to haunt us. If adventure games are dead we must be witnessing some sort of zombie revolution, because we've got the damn things coming out of our ears. Apart from *Escape From Monkey Island*, we're being assaulted with lifeless titles that are only funny when they're meant to be serious, crammed with bad dialogue, poor voice acting and unoriginal puzzles. *Stupid Invaders*, *The Ward* and *Gilbert Goodmate* are just some recent examples, although it seems we did manage to put a bullet in *Simon The Sorcerer 3D*'s head. You can check out *Arthur's Knights II* (page 80) and *Road To India* (page 78) in this issue for further abominations. And with a new *Myst* game dragging its rotten corpse toward us, we feel like the lead in Peter Jackson's *Brain Dead*, liquefying a roomful of zombies with a rusty lawnmower. Well, someone's got to do it.

"BY THE FIRST EGG!"

And the reason for such a gratuitous outburst? Well, *Dragonriders* may well be set in a world of fantasy, extensively explored by Anne McCaffrey in her novels, and look like a *Severance: Blade Of Darkness* wannabe, but it's definitely an adventure game. Not a terrible one – and certainly much better than the adventure games mentioned earlier – but hardly a classic. It suffers from many of the problems plaguing the others (poor dialogue, uneven acting) and falls into the trap of being too dull for its own good. We're sure the Pern books are entertaining works of fiction for anyone interested in that kind of fantasy, but having characters come out with things like "By the first egg! We must make haste and lead B'Toh to the chamber of Mak'l" or some such nonsense makes it quite difficult for non-fans to get involved.

"Most of the time it feels like the actors are reading their lines for the first time, rehearsing rather than acting"

You play D'Kor, a young dragonrider in the world of Pern, where humans and dragons form bonds from birth and do battle against the strange organisms called Threads that fall from the sky and kill everything they touch. But this game has little to do with flying through the air doing war. *Drakkan*, which was no doubt influenced by the *Dragonrider* books, already did that. Here, story and dialogue are central, although there is a little fighting involved.

When the Weyrwoman, leader of D'Kor's clan dies, there is a scramble to find a replacement. The story opens as you try to assemble the senior members of the clan for a meeting. This entails talking to them all. A lot.

EVERYONE IS TALKING AT ME

The developers have targetted the Pern book readers to such an extent that *Dragonriders* feels more like an interactive novel with graphics and reams and reams of dialogue. The problem with this is that, while the verbiage is full of detail and serves to tell the story in real depth, it's too straightforward in its delivery. When you click on another character you can't choose a topic and, whenever there is a dialogue option, it's usually between a helpful, courteous answer or a rude one that isn't going to get you anywhere. The worst part, however, is that you can't skip any of it. And when some crap actor starts droning on about something for the 12th time, that is exactly what you want to do.

Most of the time it feels like the actors are reading their lines for the first time, rehearsing rather than acting. At some points it actually sounds as if they've paused mid-sentence to turn a page and their tone is emotionless throughout. Particularly exasperating is your dragon, with whom you keep telepathic communication. For a creature that is supposed to be graceful, beautiful and huge, it has the slowest, dreariest voice in the whole game. Physically it doesn't seem quite right either. To paraphrase Woody Allen, the dragons look like hairless donkeys with wings. And that's not the only awkward graphical glitch.

HEY, I'M AN RPG TOO

Provided you have a hefty machine and a decent 3D card, *Dragonriders* looks quite good. The problem is that instead of having a camera that follows you *Tomb Raider*-style (and given that the controls are the same, it would

IN PERSPECTIVE

First Resistance was an awful McCaffrey-inspired game even fans should steer clear of, while *Escape From Monkey Island* is about the only good adventure game released in recent memory. If you want to fly dragons instead of talking to them try *Drakkan*.

Dragonriders

Escape From Monkey Island

Drakkan

Freedom: First Resistance

WALKTHROUGH

IT'S DUD TO TALK

Doing things is mostly a matter of talking to people in the right order



After waking up with a hangover, D'Kor is told by his dragon that his hide is itchy and needs oiling. Find the oil and brush and do it.



The engine works better in big outdoor environments.



Planescape: Torment had loads of dialogue, but it was well written.



"Hey dragon, up here. No, not over there, up here. Oh forget about it."



A lot of work has gone into the faces. Unfortunately, they all look like zombies on LSD.

make sense), it changes angles every few steps. As a result you can't really see where you're going, and moving around the caves where the quest begins is disorientating and annoying.

Not that it's all bad. Apart from the adventure element, there is a simple RPG system to make things more interesting and give the game more depth. Considering that puzzles are almost non-existent and consist of talking to people in the right order, the development of your character is essential to keep you interested for more than a few hours. Instead of a page full of stats, you have a few attributes that improve as you gain more experience. For example, your reputation increases the more you help others and your strength develops the more you fight. Certain characters will only talk to you if you have a high reputation and you'll only be able to interact with certain objects if you're strong enough. It's all designed to keep novice gamers from having to think for themselves too much. The same goes for the action side of the game. Combat is basic (forward to thrust, backward to block) and even the smallest physical action is simplified. In an area where you have to jump platforms to get to the other side in true Lara fashion, all you need to do is stand on the edge, press the action key and see the short in-game cutscene, then repeat with the next edge.

It goes without saying that McCaffrey enthusiasts will get much more out of this than the rest of us and, at the very least, it's a huge improvement on *Freedom: First Resistance*. PZ

END

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM **Processor** P266 **Memory** 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 3D card **WE SAY** PII 350 with 128Mb and a 16Mb 3D card

PCZVERDICT

UPPERS Deep and epic story • Simple but successful RPG elements

DOWNERS Too much dull talking • Poor acting • Annoying camera

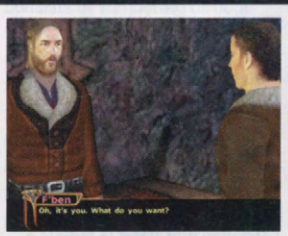
63 An audiovisual book



2 Next you need to talk to everyone in the caves. This bloke got too drunk last night and attacked someone, you need to find who and apologise for him.



3 In the kitchen, you'll find Tom, the cook who was attacked. No need to do anything, just listen to the dialogue as you apologise.



4 It seems no one can do anything for themselves here. This guy wants to borrow a ballad from someone else but is too lazy to get it.



5 Like a good lapdog, go and find the ballad owner. Listen to the ensuing conversation then take the ballad to the other pillock.

THE NATIONS

£29.99 • JoWood Productions • Out now

Keith Pullin doubts the sanity of a nation

Aaah – isn't it cute? Look at the way the trees sway; marvel at the hopping bunnies with their floppy ears; bask in the bustling sounds of a prosperous town, and raise an eyebrow at the large-breasted Pimmons, the one-breasted Amazons and the no-breasted Sajiki insectoids.

The Nations is a surreal mix of *The Settlers*, *Zeus* and *Black & White* with gameplay focusing almost entirely on establishing a thriving economic community through understanding different types of characters (and races) under your control. To a certain extent it works well and for a few hours it's surprising how much you genuinely care about what happens to this utterly bizarre collection of creatures. The ability to satisfy each inhabitant's desires by creating jobs and homes specifically for them leaves you with a definite feeling that everybody in the town is important. Indeed, losing just one of these cogs often has devastating consequences.

This novel individuality does raise a few problems though; as far as we can see it's impossible to stop somebody from doing their job once they've started, which is especially irritating if you have an overzealous lumberjack roaming the forests. The inability to directly control any characters, bar the knight, is also highly frustrating.

Trading is another needlessly contrived area of play and becomes more so the further you get into the game. Still, if you concentrate on just killing your enemies, it's lots more fun.

In truth *The Nations* is unlikely to make an impact, and yet there's no denying this pleasant offering rekindles a sense of innocence and fun that is so rarely seen these days. *The Nations* is a timely reminder to us all that RTS games don't have to be historically, or indeed, metaphorically up their own arses to be enjoyable, although apparently it helps.



Destroying an enemy town hall means victory.



A witchdoctor checks out some herbs.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM **Processor** PII 350 **Memory** 32Mb RAM, 300Mb HD Space **WE SAY** PIII 600 with 128Mb RAM and good 3D acceleration

PCZ VERDICT

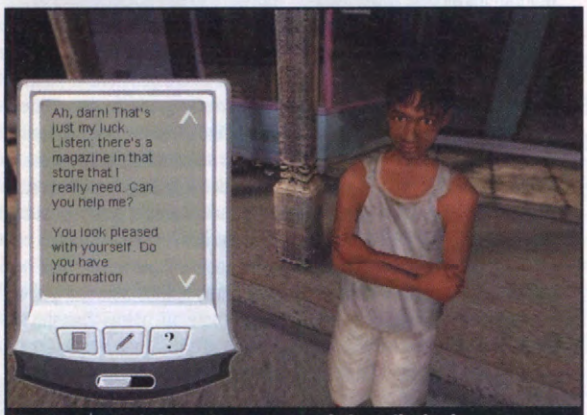
UPPERS Harmless fun for everyone • Nice graphics and sound • Easy to get into

DOWNERS No individual control over units • Poor trade interface

65 A divided nation



The zoom facility is pretty impressive.



The box copy only has cutscene screenshots on the back. Not images like these.



An unnecessary dream sequence, complete with blurry screen edges.

ROAD TO INDIA

£19.99 • Microids • Out now

Another dreadful graphical adventure joins the *Myst* pile-up. *Mark Hill* trawls through the wreckage

PCZONE PANTS Some people regarded the announcement of *Myst III* with wondrous expectation, wrote six-page previews about it and slapped a marble tower on their front cover. At the *ZONE* office, the reaction went something like this: "Huh? Who gives a toss? (Stifled yawn). Pass me another doughnut."

Like Jeffrey Archer novels, flight simulator add-on discs and Travis albums, it's clear *Myst*-style graphical adventures have a big fanbase. These are people who love the simplicity and superficial prettiness of it all. Thankfully, most of them don't read this mag, so I can announce without any hesitation that *Road To India* is a monumentally crap game.

It's possible that the target audience has never played *Half-Life*, found *Monkey Island* too sophisticated and probably thought *Deus Ex* was one of those alcopops those darn young 'uns drink. So it might seem unfair to criticise an engine that only allows you to move in a limited direction. Or to point out that the puzzles are so easy and straightforward they're hardly puzzles at all (what would you do if the only thing you could see was a monkey and the only object in your inventory was a banana?). But at least let us moan about the main character, a right tosser called Fred Reynolds (no, really). For some reason, *Road To India* follows in the footsteps of *Broken Sword* and provides yet another irritating American, so badly voiced you won't be able to play without gritting your teeth.

India is densely populated but, from playing this, you'd think it was some sort of post-apocalyptic landscape full of empty buildings, empty streets and the odd cow. Avoid like the plague.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM **Processor** P266 **Memory** 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 8Mb video card **WE SAY** You can make it run faster, but what's the point?

PCZ VERDICT

UPPERS Puzzles entirely logical

DOWNERS Puzzles too simple • Annoying main character • Incredibly linear • Washed-out graphics

18 Road to Hell more like

OPEN KART

£19.99 • Microids • Out now

Steve Hill has a go in a buggy

Call us bluff old traditionalists, but we can remember a time when games were fun. A time when they were actually designed to entertain the person who had bought them. We can't remember exactly when that time was, but suffice to say that *Open Kart* doesn't belong there. Is anybody really interested in tweaking the tyre pressure and weight distribution of what is little more than a glorified lawnmower? Adjusting the rigidity of the chassis? Do us a favour.

As joyless a piece of software as we've seen, *Open Kart* takes what is basically an uncomplicated sport and attempts to fashion it into a worthy simulation. However, it doesn't go as far as attempting to replicate any kind of recognised karting association event, and as such falls between the two stools of arcade action and authenticity. Put simply, it's a bland karting game that doesn't do anything particularly wrong, yet offers no convincing argument for purchase. The graphics are what would have been described as photo-realistic a few years ago, the sound is adequate, and the usual array of generic tracks are all in place.

Longevity is offered by a career mode, albeit one which is hopelessly unbalanced, to the extent that if you don't succeed in the early races, you won't be able to afford to enter the later ones. Tyres and engine parts deteriorate at an alarming rate, with the cost of maintaining a competitive kart beyond all but the top prize-winners. And without a decent kart, you can't win a race, presenting something of a vicious circle. Dickheads.

The racing itself is passable, if a trifle dull, and the game is by no means unplayable. It's just that *Super Mario Kart* is probably a hundred times more fun.



A race can be won or lost in the first corner carnage.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM **Processor** PII 350 or AMD K6-2 500 **Memory** 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 12Mb D3D compatible video card **WE SAY** Almost, but not quite

PCZVERDICT

UPPERS Three classes of kart • Ambient sound effects

DOWNERS Overly technical • Flawed career mode • Dull

37 **Krap Note**


"You can't park there, mate."


There are two episodes to play through. They're set in the same locations, but in one you have paint on your face. Nifty, eh?


You spend a lot of time on this horse. And there's not even a coconut sound effect.


Apparently there will be a special DVD edition out for Christmas combining both chapters. Can't wait.

ARTHUR'S KNIGHTS CHAPTER II: THE SECRET OF MERLIN

£19.99 • Cryo • Out now

Mark Hill doesn't eat spam, but he does have a round dinner table

Remember *Arthur's Knights Chapter I*? Neither do we. Apparently it came out in November last year and somehow managed to pass us by. Never mind, because this is more of a continuation than a sequel and both gameplay and graphics are relatively unchanged. Of course, if you were suckered into buying the first game it's not going to do you a whole lot of good to find out just how rubbish it is now. Well, you should know not to buy any game we haven't reviewed. There's usually a reason. Like the publishers did everything in their power to hide it from us.

The title is self-explanatory. The game is set during the times of Arthurian legend when the world consisted of a couple of roads, two villas and a handful of people. Or at least that's the version *The Secret Of Merlin* tries to put forth.

Although, strictly speaking, this can be classed as an adventure game, there are no puzzles to speak of. Gameplay consists of wandering through the map talking to people, picking up objects and using them. Everything is straightforward and the only challenge is to stay awake and not become dangerously annoyed at the amount of time it takes to get from one point of the map to another.

Most places only have one character you can talk to, and even then it's only if you have been to the previous correct place beforehand. Everything must be done in rigorous order.

The other gripes include the graphics being second rate, the dialogue being risible, while the voice-acting ranges from the passable to the absolutely murderously awful. Sometimes in games this can provide some laughs, but in *The Secret Of Merlin* it's just plain old aggravating. I'd be more vitriolic, but it's actually quite hard to get worked up about something so dull.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM **Processor** P300 **Memory** 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 8Mb video card **WE SAY** The usual extra memory for smoother performance

PCZVERDICT

UPPERS Good horse animation

DOWNERS No proper puzzles • Endless wandering • Bad dialogue • Dull, dull, dull

27 **One of the most boring adventure games ever**


Dug-a-dug-a-dug-a-dug.



Nice little motah.


Enemies ahead. Quick, turn around.

PEARL HARBOUR: STRIKE AT DAWN

Price £19.99 • Koch media • Out now

In 1941 the Japanese were repulsed by America. *Daniel Emery* is repulsed by this game

PCZONE PANTS OK, let's get a few things straight. The Americans did not 'win' at Pearl Harbour. They were caught with their pants down, and had it not been for the pure luck that their aircraft carriers were at sea, Japan might well have knocked America out of the war in the Pacific (at least for sufficient time to achieve its goals). What's more the US was not geared up for full-scale military action. Their equipment was vastly inferior to the Japanese, and the men had poor training. Not a great way to start a war. And not a great way to start a game either. At least if you're American.

So developer Scarlet Software has dropped all pretence of any historical reality, and given the Americans the best aircraft developed during WWII. So instead of ageing P40s (if you've seen the film, you'll know what we mean) you get 1945 vintage aircraft. There's even the B29 Superfortress that dropped the atom bomb. The developer should have just called it *Pacific War* and had done with it, instead of trying to piggyback one of the most expensive (and worst) films ever made.

All this would be forgivable, if the game was any cop. But the long and short of it is that it isn't. The game gets dull within the first 30 seconds, and within two minutes, you're searching for the uninstall option. It's just clumsy arcade-style action, which still manages to lag up on a high spec PC. You can't even play as the Japanese, so any scope for actually attacking the American fleet is lost. And we haven't even touched on the rotten control interface. If you are daft enough to buy this donkey, make sure you keep the receipt. Then you can exchange it for something more worthwhile, like an inflatable banana.

TECH SPECS

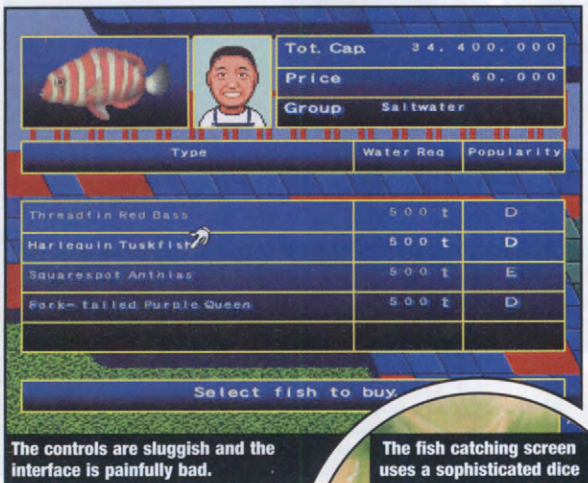
MINIMUM SYSTEM **Processor** PII **Memory** 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 8Mb 3D Card **WE SAY** PIII 800+ and it will struggle, a 128Mb and 32Mb 3D Card

PCZVERDICT

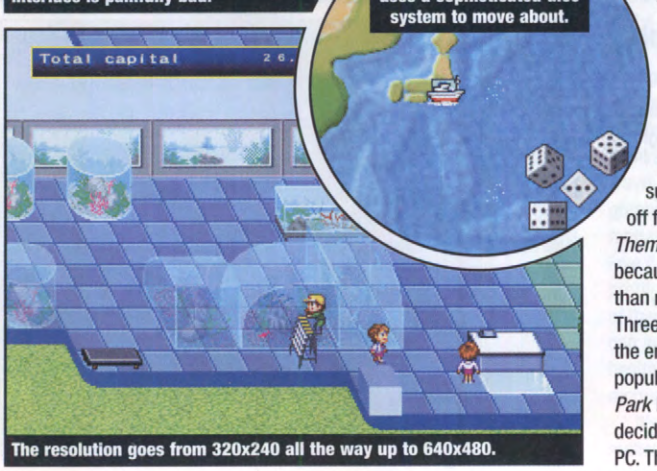
UPPERS Remarkably fast to un-install

DOWNERS Everything else

10 **Utter cobblers**



The controls are sluggish and the interface is painfully bad.



The fish catching screen uses a sophisticated dice system to move about.

The resolution goes from 320x240 all the way up to 640x480.

AQUARIUM

£19.99 • EA • Out now

***Mark Hill* thought he'd seen it all in this industry. He was wrong**

PCZONE PANTS Sometimes the cynicism of game publishers astonishes us. Not often, because we've grown quite used to it, but now and again a title is released that makes you want to throw large stones at their office windows or clap your hands at their sheer audacity.

Get this. In 1998, the Japanese branch of EA released a pretty substandard *Theme Park* rip-off for the PlayStation called *Theme Aquarium*, presumably because fish are more popular than roller coasters in Japan. Three years later, and following the entirely coincidental mass-popularity of *The Sims* and *Theme Park World*, the European office decides to port said game to the PC. They drop the *Theme* bit off the title, so as not to be too obvious, and hope that a few poor sods take the bait.

To top it all off, it's an absolutely awful conversion of a terrible game, that would have looked slightly dated more than five years ago. We're talking Megadrive and SNES type graphics. Hell, they would look ropey on a GameBoy Colour.

The idea, as you've probably guessed, is to build an aquarium, fill it with fish and watch the visitors pile in. You can install all sorts of different tank shapes, buy rare fish from dodgy dealers, organise expeditions to catch them, hire cleaners and doctors and train dolphins to do tricks. It's like a scaled down version of *Theme Hospital*, with a couple of original ideas poorly implemented.

EA Japan's website says that *Theme Aquarium* was developed by Bullfrog, but their name is mentioned nowhere in this and the manual cites some Japanese programmers instead. Which sounds a lot more likely. Bullfrog would never stoop to producing something as horrendous as this.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM **Processor** P166 **Memory** 64Mb RAM **WE SAY** Should be able to run on a Spectrum

PCZVERDICT

UPPERS Mildly interesting concept

DOWNERS Incredibly dated • Awful console port • Almost unplayable

15 **Stinks something rotten**

THE STING!

£29.99 • JoWood Productions • Out now

Steve Hill heads back to the streets in search of some action

PC ZONE PANTS This has nothing to do with the classic film of the same name, and nothing to do with the former lead singer of The Police. The busies do feature heavily though, as it's the latest in a minor genre of burgle 'em ups, or as the box describes it, "the blag simulation". It's certainly blag, but only in the sense that it's utterly worthless.

We see some crap here, but occasionally a game turns up that is so bad as to frankly beggar belief. This is one of them, and it is so flawed it's difficult to know where to begin. The concept is sound enough – get together a firm and embark on a life of crime – but unfortunately it's executed in such a cack-handed fashion as to make you want to stop playing it at the earliest possible opportunity.

Graphically, it's an appalling mess, hampered by clipping, fogging and ridiculously basic textures. According to the accompanying literature, this gives the game a unique style. This is the same literature that claims the perennial fogging is because the game is set in a foggy city, "the largest virtual 3D city ever seen in a computer game," no less. Absolute bollocks.

Essentially, you wander around, make contacts and carry out robberies, assisted by a variety of tools and the best getaway car you can afford. The interface for the robberies is perverse, and involves recording the action and watching it back to see where you went wrong. The problem with this is it's almost impossible to fail a mission, as you simply rewind the action and have another go if you mess anything up. This also gives you a limitless amount of time to think about each puzzle.

It's an ill-conceived idea and fails to elevate *The Sting!* from the mire. Asking £30 for this rubbish is nothing short of daylight robbery.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor PII 300 **Memory** 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 16Mb D3D video card **WE SAY** Looks bad on any system

PCZVERDICT

UPPERS Involves thieving • Features toilets

DOWNERS Risible graphics • Poorly designed • Laborious gameplay • Irksome interface

12 Not worth stealing

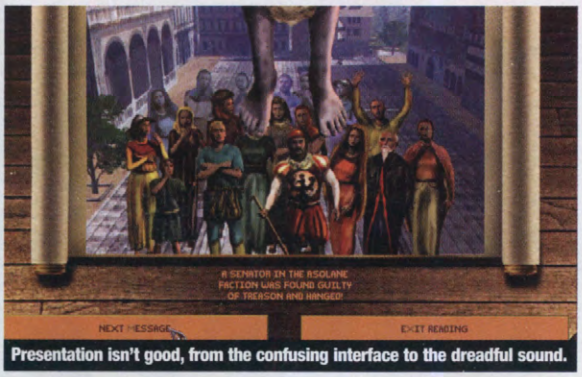


Well, ain't that the truth.

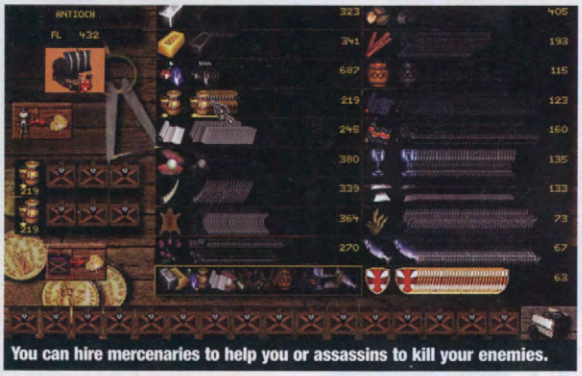


State of the art graphics, 20 years ago maybe.

MERCHANT PRINCE II



Presentation isn't good, from the confusing interface to the dreadful sound.



You can hire mercenaries to help you or assassins to kill your enemies.

£24.99 • Take 2 Interactive • Out now

Mark Hill will trade you this game for money or book tokens

Good old games were great, but would you play *Civ I*, *SimCity* or *Wolfenstein 3D* now? Only those who answer yes to this question will be interested in this game.

The first *Merchant Prince* was released in 1993 and this is more a conversion for new Windows systems than a proper sequel. Sure, it has added scenarios, a research system and spruced up graphics, but it's still an eight-year-old game.


The game is a *Civ* rip-off at heart.

You play a Venetian trader at the heart of the Renaissance in a race to beat the other three merchants to one million florins. Sound easy? It isn't. *Merchant Prince II* is a hardcore turn-based strategy, which might come as a surprise since the bulk of the game is spent going from port to port trading products. But that isn't all you need to do to succeed. There are politicians and religious authorities to be bribed, other trading houses and pirates to do battle with, and roads to be built.

Don't come to it expecting some kind of *Renaissance Elite*. This game is strictly for old-timers who pine for the original and like to get involved in convoluted gameplay. If you're new to it, it'll probably take you a week of patient playing to begin to master it and not get lost in the confusion of screens and options. It's hard not to be disheartened at first, especially when it looks so poor. If you can make it through the obtuseness and almost vertical learning slope, there is a rich game to explore. But don't say we didn't warn you.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor P166 **Memory** 32Mb RAM **WE SAY** That should do it

PCZVERDICT

UPPERS Very deep and involving • Old-style turn-based gameplay

DOWNERS Too hard• Steep learning curve • Very dated

63 Old, tough and ugly. Just like us

NEW LOOK CVG. MISS IT, MISS OUT.





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PC GAMING FOR THE MASSES www.pczone.co.uk #6 SEP 2001



ONLINE REVIEW

LEGENDS OF MIGHT & MAGIC

Get the girl and kill the baddies as Counter-Strike puts on pixie boots

SPECIAL REPORT
BROADBAND
What is BT up to?

SPECIAL FEATURE

THE FUTURE OF ONLINE GAMING

The games and technology of tomorrow

ONLINE REVIEW

BLACK & WHITE

As good online as off?

PLUS! THE REALM ONLINE · WESTERN QUAKE III · MIDGUARD · OPERATION STINGRAY · DUNE GENERATIONS · AND MORE

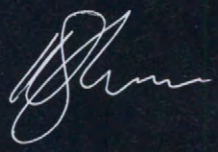
ANARCHY NOT IN THE UK



Racking up huge Internet phone bills has become a thing of the past; fixed-rate access is now pretty much standard. Costs have generally come down (it's cheaper here than in the US) and with broadband slowly being introduced across the country, high-speed access is destined to become the standard rather than the exception. The UK is ready to come out and play on an even battlefield.

Or we would be if the games were available to play. Early last month *WWII Online* hit the streets, or rather the sidewalks, of America. Following close behind was *Anarchy Online*. One game is set in Europe, the other developed here, and yet neither game is available to the mass of Europe's online gamers. Not that I'm looking to blame anyone, but it's a cruel irony that online gaming is cheaper now than at any time in the past, yet the newest games are going elsewhere.

The good news is that *WWII Online* will hit Europe soon. Publishers are taking an interest even if the game has had a troubled start. *Anarchy Online* is also available to download (only a few hundred Mb for all you 28K modem fans), and although a boxed release is on the cards, electronic distribution of games – multiplayer or otherwise – is something I reckon we'll just have to get used to. Making a game is an expensive business, more so when someone else has to produce thousands of CDs, manuals and boxes to put it all in.



Richie Shoemaker
Online Editor

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New technology and bigger and better games. We look to the future of online gaming.

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It's *Counter-Strike* in a codpiece, the latest in the *Might & Magic* series. It's online only and the first real review is inside.

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95 EMPEROR: BATTLE FOR DUNE
Westwood's latest gets the online review treatment.

95 THE REALM ONLINE
Long before *EverQuest*, in the days before *Ultima Online*, was this...

HOW WE SCORE ONLINE GAMES

You'll notice our Online scores are out of five. This is partly to avoid confusion with scores in the main *PC ZONE* reviews section and partly so we don't have to decide between giving a mod 63 or 64 per cent, plus it looks nice. Five stars means great, and one doesn't. It's pretty simple really.

PCZVERDICT

- ★★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★☆ Very good
- ★★★☆☆ Decent
- ★★☆☆☆ Not bad
- ★☆☆☆☆ Bad



Resource management plays a big part in this game, obviously.

DUNE GENERATIONS

Cryo announces second *Dune* game

Cryo is in the process of recreating Frank Herbert's enigmatic world of *Dune* for your online gaming pleasure, and from what we've seen, it could well blow the competition out of the water when it arrives later this year. Graphically, *Dune Generations* already looks streets ahead of the current competition, and if Cryo can marry the addictive resource management found in single-player attempts at recreating *Dune* with the obvious appeal of playing with (and against) other players online, it will surely be on to a winner.

Dune Generations promises to offer players a wide variety of playing styles. Traders will concentrate on commercial strategies, mercenaries will undertake missions for other players in the game; and warriors will presumably busy themselves with blowing up every player character that gets in their way.

Your primary objective in *Dune Generations* will be to gain prestige points (experience points). The more you get, the higher level you become. If your house becomes powerful enough, you will be in a position to contact the Fremen to request the rights to mine spice, the planet's most coveted commodity. The first house to reach this stage will have an obvious advantage over their rivals, but they will need to keep the Fremen happy if they want to stay in this position, and can easily be overthrown if they cock up at any point.

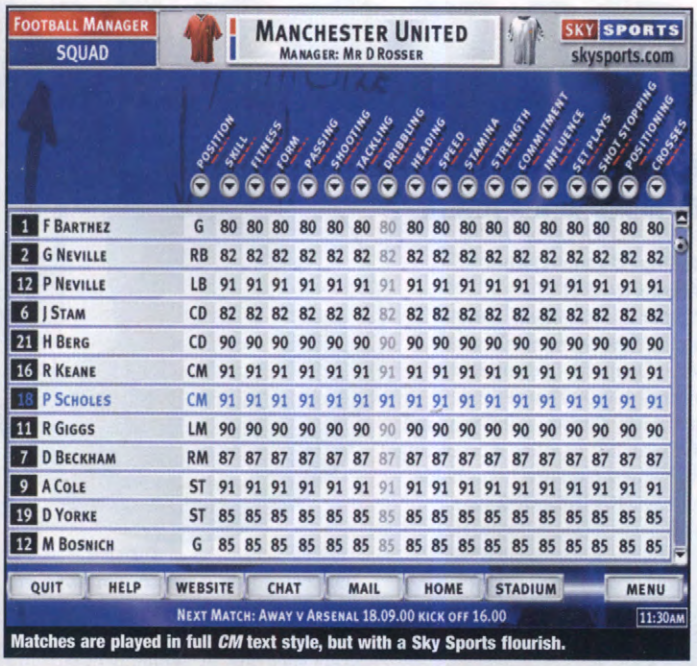
It will be interesting to see how Cryo deals with potential imbalances (such as most players opting for the same house), and also how it will handle the proposed 2,000 players per server, given that the engine (which supports both ground and space battles) can handle 500 units on screen at any one time.

Dune Generations is an intriguing prospect and we will be bringing you more news on this potential blockbuster as soon as we get it.

MIDGARD

Norse code from Funcom

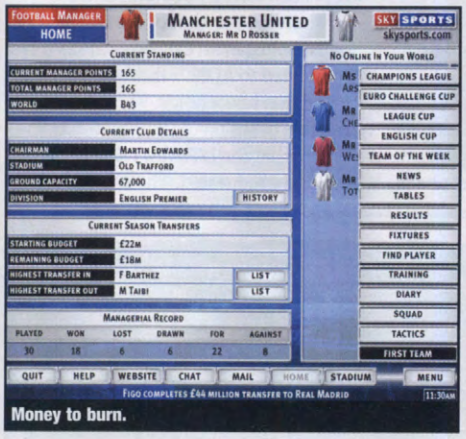
Having changed the face of online RPGs with *Anarchy Online*, Funcom is working on another big title which will also explore new territory. *Midgard* is set in the world of Norse mythology. It gives players the opportunity to perfect a number of professions (such as tailor, farmer, hunter, blacksmith) and contribute to and control the world economy. Where most games of this ilk veer heavily towards battle and levelling, *Midgard* will supposedly place the emphasis on strategic thinking, with a splattering of resource management thrown in. Successful players will eventually be in a position to persuade lesser players to join their 'tribe' (this sounds eerily similar to the guilds set up by players in existing online RPGs), and so should have ample opportunity to feed their egotistical fantasies at the expense of lesser mortals. A game of this nature with the emphasis on politics over brawn could make for an intriguing game environment indeed, and it could prove to be a refreshing change from the mindless levelling most online RPGs promote. Greater depth in trade professions would certainly give it an edge over *EverQuest* for example. All will be revealed when *Midgard* arrives at the end of 2002.



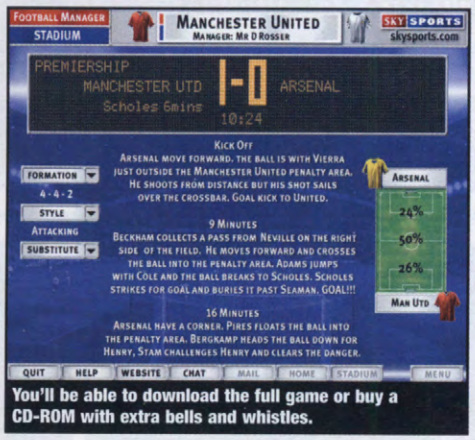
Matches are played in full *CM* text style, but with a Sky Sports flourish.



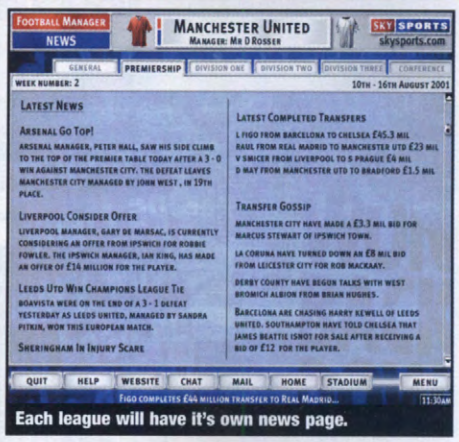
We hear Coventry City are hiring.



Money to burn.



You'll be able to download the full game or buy a CD-ROM with extra bells and whistles.



Each league will have it's own news page.

SKY SPORTS FOOTBALL MANAGER

Sure to be *Champ Man 4*'s biggest rival

Not to be confused with its fantasy football game, *Sky Sports Football Manager* is yet another fully-fledged online simulation, and is brought to you by THQ in association with the broadcasting giants.

With an online version of *Championship Manager* still so far away, there has been no shortage of games throwing their hat into the ring. *Play As Manager*, *Internet Football Club*, *Pure Football* and *Soccersim* have all been trying to capture the massive audience that *CM* has in the hope of turning a profit before the big boys move in. But *Sky Sports* is bound to command greater attention. It is an established brand with footie lovers everywhere. And the game doesn't look half bad either.

While most of the elements will be familiar to everyone, what really sets *SSFM* apart is that matches are played live rather than delivered as a full-time result. Everyone who has played an online management game knows that you never feel in control of your team like you do in *Champ Man*, for the simple reason that it is usually while matches are being played that they are won or lost – funny that. Substitutions and tactical changes to reflect what is happening on the field are just as important as buying players and getting the starting line-up right. Other titles – *Soccersim*, for example – let you set parameters for changes to be made during matches (eg move to attacking formation if a goal down after 20 minutes), but *Sky Sports* lets you make all those decisions on the fly. We're not sure how it will work yet, but we suppose you and your opposite sheepskin will have to log on at a predetermined time.

"Tactical changes are as important as getting the starting line-up right... *Sky Sports* lets you make all those decisions on the fly"

The rest of the game is as you'd expect. Real teams and players from the five English divisions, buying and selling and training are all present and correct. Perhaps the most original idea is that of world tiers to let all the best managers play in the same leagues. Everyone starts off at the same level, but the best can attain Bronze, Silver and, eventually, Gold Status. When you combine this with the chance to win cash prizes you can see how intense the competition will be.

The game launches in August, although you can test it free of charge in July, and will work (in true Sky fashion) via a monthly subscription charge of £6.99. Apparently, UK Gold won't be included in the package. For info, screenshots and free registration check out www.nisports.com.

LINKS

VALHALLA CHRONICLES



Valhalla Chronicles dumps you in the middle of Midgard as a lowly chieftain with nary a heroic deed to your name. Through successful completion of missions and quests, your hero will eventually have access to other parts of Valhalla, where the Gods will task you with even tougher missions, perhaps even a battle with the evil Ragnarok himself. It all sounds a bit silly to us, whether the game itself will rise above the competition, only time will tell. Go to www.valhalla-chronicles.com for the latest.

BLACKMOON CHRONICLES



There clearly aren't enough fantasy-based online RPGs in development. It's just as well then that *Blackmoon Chronicles* (www.blackmoon-online.com) is on its way to you in November this year. Create a character and choose from four factions (Emperor, Order Of Light, Knights Of Justice and Black Moon) then venture out into the wilderness for what the developers promise will be "some good old hack and slash fun". We can't wait.

RUNESCAPE



If you don't fancy paying US$10 a month for the latest hi-tech online fantasy RPG, take a look at *RuneScape* (www.runescape.com). It's got everything you could possibly need: spells, combat, trading, real people online etc, and you can play the beta for free. As you can see from the screenshot, there is a small snag. That's right, it looks completely knob.

IS BROADBAND

It's been a slow process as gamers wait to join the broadband revolution. *Paul Rigby* looks to the future


Andy Reynolds is not a happy man.

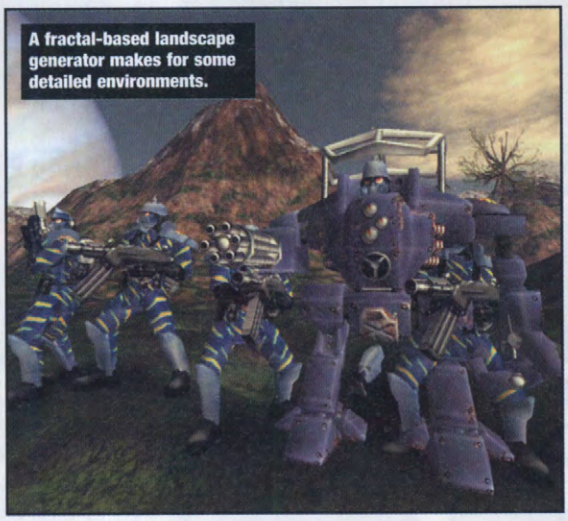
"Our view of the way BT has handled the rollout of ADSL has been widely documented, and we are not afraid to say it is a national disgrace."

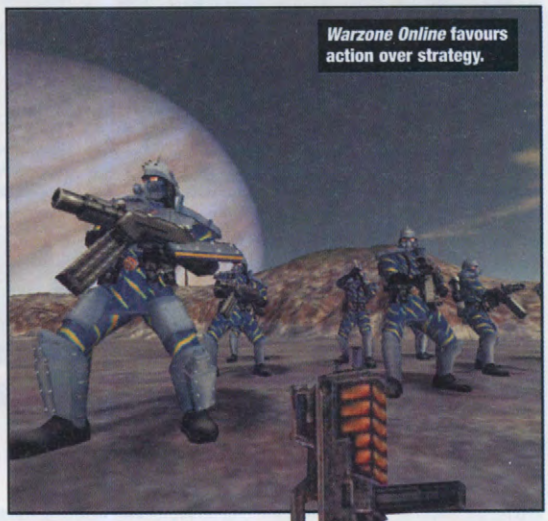
Andy Reynolds, games producer for AOL UK, is not a happy man. ADSL (Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line), the acronym for the much lauded 'broadband' connection, will revolutionise, not just online gaming, but, in time, the entire face of PC and console gaming, allowing games to run faster and offer more advanced features. However, as the sole provider of ADSL, Reynolds claims BT's initial promise and "subsequent delays" in rolling out these services to businesses and consumers is holding back users (including PC gamers) from connecting to ADSL.

"To put this in context," says Reynolds, "the German telecoms provider Deutsche Telekom had connected 400,000 homes and businesses by Christmas last year and the German ISP T-Online is predicting there will be 2.6 million households on ADSL by December this year. BT's efforts are, frankly, pathetic and embarrassing in comparison. The process BT has put in place for the rollout of ADSL is a nightmare, a chaotic mess, almost guaranteed to drive ISPs and their customers insane with frustration."

"The process BT has put in place for the rollout of ADSL is a nightmare, a chaotic mess..."

Chris Gibbs, vice-president for broadband at BT is a little taken aback by Reynold's comments: "I'm surprised and slightly confused because we've announced our rollout targets and kept each one. By September we will have 60 per cent of the UK's households, in an exchange area, connected to ADSL – that's more than 14 million households. We're currently capable of supplying at least three times what the ISPs (eg Telewest, NTL, etc) have requested. The old 'allocation'


A fractal-based landscape generator makes for some detailed environments.


Warzone Online favours action over strategy.

WARZONE ONLINE

Squad-based strategy goes online

Based on the original board game of the same name, *Warzone Online* is being heralded as a 3D battle title by its developer Paradox Entertainment. This would seem to indicate that *Warzone Online* will be heavily combat-based, which is in stark contrast to the online games currently available or in development. The basic premise for the game is to build a large army, comprised of units you collect over time in the game, and then assign them to squads before setting out to kick the daylights out of other players and their squads.

Each squad can consist of anything up to eight troops, and it will be up to you to decide which units have the skills best suited to your current situation before assigning them to a squad and sending them into battle. Each squad has a commander (you, basically) who can issue orders to other units in battle, and the rank of the commander will determine how effective he is and how many units he can command. With action-based gameplay, *Warzone Online* could prove to be the online RPG that casual gamers have been craving for. Go to www.paradoxplaza.com for more.



LAGGING BEHIND?

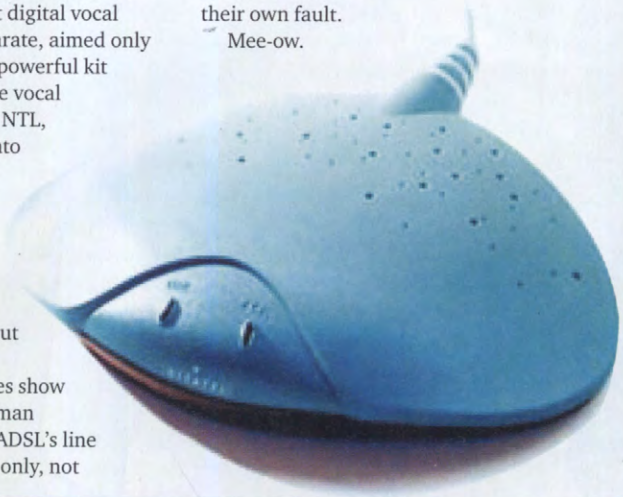
(a rationing of lines imposed when BT launched its service last August) of ADSL lines to ISPs finished last month."

Gibbs boasts that BT's ADSL "engineering feat" is on par, if not exceeding, the transferral from analogue to digital lines in the 1980s. Gibbs says: "BT has created a whole new network for ADSL. The ADSL network does not use or depend on the present digital vocal network, it is totally separate, aimed only at ADSL, packs a host of powerful kit and runs parallel with the vocal service. The ISPs such as NTL, Telewest, etc, just plug into this new network."

Gibbs says, ADSL is a technology everyone believes is easy to implement, "...but it isn't," he insists. Reynolds' comments about Germany add to Gibbs' frustration: "Those figures show how fast T-Online, a German provider, has connected ADSL's line up to the available space only, not how quickly the ADSL network has been created in the first place, which is what we are doing."

Gibbs claims BT provides as much ADSL space as the ISPs can now cope with, and that it's up to the ISPs to supply that to the public. The inference being, if the ISPs wish to moan about their lot, it's their own fault.

Mee-ow.



ADSL SPEAK

BROADBAND – THE LATEST

The lowdown on getting connected

BT has some good news for prospective ADSL users. While striving for a wider coverage of ADSL in the UK BT has been testing and has now cleared an enhanced technology that will extend the ADSL Exchange range. This means users who can't currently access ADSL may be able to do so. The technology began to go live in June and is ramping up throughout July and August. We recommend you keep in touch with BT on the progress of your local Exchange.

Even if you fall in range of the updated Exchanges it might be best to hang on until the end of the year as BT is also testing advanced filter technology, which will allow you to pick up an ADSL modem from the high street and install it yourself, which means saving some cash. Until now, a BT engineer has had to do the job, mainly because your line requires special filters to stop the ADSL line from interfering with your voice calls. Now BT has developed a plug-in filter that stands between the wall socket and the phone, so your ADSL modem can be plugged into the wall socket. We should not only see plug-in ADSL modems sitting on Dixon's shelves but pre-fitted ADSL chips in new PCs too. Happy days, eh?

OPERATION FLASHPOINT

Multiplayer crisis will be over soon

Straight to Number 1 in the hit parade, you may have been wondering why we haven't reviewed *Operation Flashpoint*'s online multiplayer game yet. Well, on the occasions where it didn't manage to crash out, we found that games were either boring or laggy. But then *Flashpoint* has yet to arrive on the shores of America, for the simple reason that the multiplayer game is far from complete and dedicated servers have yet to be set up – and Americans sure do get mighty ticked off in such circumstances. So for the indignity of being made multiplayer guinea pigs, we at least have access to one of the finest single-player games of the year so far, well in advance of our cousins across the Atlantic.

In the meantime, Codemasters has announced a series of monthly upgrade packs, each offering new weapons, vehicles and maps. The first – offering a new US helicopter, a Soviet plane, a new rifle, two single-player missions and five for multiplayer games, it should be available now from www.codemasters.com/flashpoint.

The second upgrade, to coincide with the games US release in August, will introduce the dedicated online component, plus two extra vehicles, hardware and mission editor enhancements and another seven maps. Plans are set to release another upgrade pack in September, by which time you can expect a full review.





Your solo playing days are over.



Well, almost.

LINKS

CALL OF THE WARLORDS



Call Of The Warlords (www.cotwarloards.com) doesn't look at this point as though it will deliver the graphical punch of the big boys in the online gaming arena, but it certainly makes up for it with its many features. Diplomacy and political intrigue play a huge part in what promises to be an online fantasy RPG with more features than you can put a pointy hat on.

CLUSTERBALL



Due out in September is the 56K modem-friendly *Clusterball*, an online game where players must fly around various arenas picking up balls and towing them through hoops in order to score points. Worldwide leagues are already in place, and although the game won't be on the shelves for a few weeks, a one level demo can be found at www.clusterball.com.


THE FUTURE
OF ONLINE GAMING
ALCATEL

PC gamers have been branded with many names during their time at the keyboard ('beard' being one of our particular favourites), but the one that is perhaps the most accurate should surely be 'boundary pusher'. This is not so much about the limits of human endurance (though staying up for three days straight playing *Champ Man* is surely about as much as any human can bear), but about pushing the limits of technology. Why? Because gaming is one of the driving forces behind computing technology. Games demand faster processors, beefier graphics cards and now with future online titles like *Planetside*, a broadband connection – a fat pipe plugged 24/7 into the digital expanse we used to call the World Wide Wait.

The adoption of broadband is currently one of the industry's hot spuds. Whether or not BT has been dragging its heels, you can be sure of one thing: the analogue modem is to the Internet what magnetic tape is to digital storage. Dead. Of course the cost of broadband will certainly have to come down or the value, in terms of bundled content will have to rise, in order for the technology to become mainstream. One service provider (a direct competitor to BT's own openworld) is taking that truism to heart. Telewest's blueyonder service recently fell in price from a comparatively reasonable £33 per month to an even better £25 per month – making it the best value broadband service out there – at the time of writing, anyway.

PLATFORM GAMES

In the future, the humble PC will be just one method of accessing online entertainment. Apart from the WAP phone, you will also be able to utilise laptops running on variations of the Bluetooth technology. Also available will be the likes of relatively large-screen phones using 3G technology (to be launched in the UK during 2002), which will offer high-resolution images on the move. These will enable you to access the Internet and play within the same game as your friends while not physically plugged into any wall socket.

This future view of gaming technology is already being tested – where else but in Japan. The Japanese are testing a cable link to the PlayStation (and PS2) console to DoCoMo GPRS mobile phones (the new colour WAP phones which will arrive in the UK this winter). As Sony's director of technology, Paul Holman, explains: "The idea is to allow new forms of entertainment for both the PlayStation and PS2, as well as the phone. The mobile phone can perhaps be used as a simple modem but, more interestingly, to allow part of the PlayStation game to be taken away and played on the phone."

Holman recently demonstrated the above at a discreet industry-invited 'PlayStation Meeting'. A PlayStation 2 was linked via a USB cable to a Sony J5 phone with an application that showed how a PlayStation game could send and receive SMS messages, as well as access the telephone address book. Of course, the PC can do this already and cook breakfast. The big question, apart from what we may soon be using to connect, is surely what we might be playing. Whether you wind up using a PC, PlayStation or mobile phone, what matters most are the games. After all, if you're a PC gamer, the reason you bought a PC is to play PC games.

GAMES, GAMES, GAMES!

The technical future of online gaming, despite being fraught with delays and hitches, is definitely approaching. Far more exciting, however, is the software-based future, which almost appears to be evolving by the month. The latest wave of online PC games have just hit, but behind the likes of *Jumpgate* and *Anarchy Online* are what you might even be so bold as to term 'third-generation' online games.

"*Neocron* (ww.neocron.com), is Reakktor's first step into the market," enthuses Jens Bremmekamp, Reakktor's game content manager. "*Neocron* is the name of a city in a 28th-century post-apocalyptic vision of the Earth. Two features that really allow it to stand out against the competitors are its setting and the combat system. Although there are several SF online games in development, none have picked up on the cyberpunk/post-apocalyptic approach. Our combat system does not rely on the skills of the character alone but also to some extent on the (mouse) skills of the player." As a RPG, *Neocron* tempts with all-action delight.

If it's total control you're after, however, look no further than Interplay's *Neverwinter Nights* (www.neverwinternights.com) due out at the end of the year. You can place terrain tiles, treasures and monsters pretty freely and then go in and edit their properties to a degree not seen in any other game. If you're feeling particularly ambitious, you can even go in and write dialogue for the NPCs, tweak their stats and AI scripts, even



Anarchy Online is ready to play.



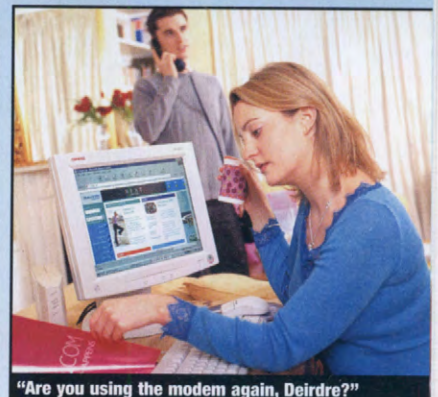
Reakktor's Jens Bremmkamp.

TASK BAR

ADSL... WHAT IS IT?

Better get yourself connected...

Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) is a permanent, high-speed digital connection run on a standard phone line. The installation of an ADSL modem and a 'splitter' (in both the telephone exchange and in your home) converts the twisted copper wires of your phone line into a permanent high-speed digital connection to the Internet. It has the added advantage of allowing you to make voice calls on a standard telephone at the same time as accessing the Internet. Speed-wise, it's between ten and 40 times faster than the modem you have in your PC.



"Are you using the modem again, Deirdre?"



EA's *Majestic* is one of the most original online games going.

TASK BAR

MULTI-LINGUAL GAMES

Voulez-vous jouer avec moi, ce soir?

US-based Enix has revealed a few of its upcoming online plans for the Asian market. According to Japanese site Nikkei Net IT News, Enix will enter the online gaming market this summer in Japan. Enix plans to work with South Korean and Taiwanese companies for the release of online games in those respective markets. Further rumours include the possible use of future multi-lingual versions of Enix games that will allow players of differing countries and cultures to talk and play together. In addition, expect to see a whole host of translated Korean games (the Koreans are fanatical online games players) to appear in Europe in the not too far distant future.

What next? Maybe a universal translator being used for future online *EverQuest* jaunts with fuzzy blobs from the planet Zob.

custom design the appearance and colour of treasure items like armour and swords.

If, on the other hand, you feel a little lazier and wish for a game with a ready history mixed with a dose of glitz and power, then the upcoming *Star Wars Galaxies* (www.starwarsgalaxies.com) online RPG being developed by LucasArts and Verant (the minds behind *EverQuest*) will do fine. Verant promise cinematic combat, as you would expect if you were watching it on the big screen. So you can expect a Jedi battle to be full of spectacular martial arts moves and light sabre play. Imagine being able to build your own droids, buy and soup up your own land speeder, buy X-wing fighters and fly them in massive space battles, build towns, elect officials and set your own laws. Oh, and yes – you can be a Light or Dark Jedi – but not until 2002.

Yes yes yes, enough about RPGs, I hear you cry. But wait, there's more to come. Take Verant's *Planetside*, a massively multiplayer first-person shoot 'em up . Set in a persistent world online, it's out at the end of the year. As producer and lead designer on the project, Kevin McCann, says: "The goal of the game really is pretty much a territorial war as you join one of four rival, warring corporations." Although the game includes a rank-based system, the combat depends on the player's reflexes and skill with the use of many weapons, which will already be familiar to *Quake* players. "You can even kill and loot players for equipment. So new players will have to be wary of the ambush," warns McCann. Of course, combat is not the be-all and end-all. *Planetside* also incorporates hacking and spying, as well as co-operative actions between other players too, for example, defend a building or territory.

"Soon you will be able to receive text messages from your friends that are in the playing field"

Funcom's forthcoming SF-based game, *Anarchy Online* is now available to download and play (www.anarchy-online.com) – review next issue. Looking towards the future, Andre Backen, president of Funcom, is investigating how his new project will be transformed via upcoming technologies: "It is the sort of multiplayer online game that will eventually be accessible from alternative platforms and not exclusively from PC," he says. "Also, you will find that certain gameplay features will be implemented in, for example, mobile devices. This means that soon you will be able to receive text messages on your mobile phone from your friends that are in the playing field."

IT'S OUT THERE...

Possibly the most extreme use of alternative platforms to enhance the standard PC is that advocated by the forthcoming online mind-bender *Majestic* (www.majestic.ea.com). A mystery adventure that's episodic in nature, it's great for those of us who just don't *have* six hours at a time to play a stand-alone boxed game. *Majestic* uses the Internet to tell its story, taking the player through both real and fictional experiences in real time. It creates a unique experience that's aimed specifically at each player, placing you within your own developing conspiracy. Think of it as a kind of *X-Files* for the Internet. Bing Gordon,, chief creative officer at Electronic Arts, explains how real-world services will become part of your fictional horror: "We were fortunate that the business arrangement between EA.com and AOL provided us with a unique level of access to AOL's Instant Messaging network and its technology components," he says. "Partnerships have also been established with Sentica, to support voice and fax delivery; HotVoice, to provide an Internet-based Unified Messaging System (UMS) for our email, vmail and efax; eGain, whose eGain Assistant provides the base technology for the conversational AI; Akamai, for hosting of streaming video and audio and AOL SpinAmp, for streaming audio clients." Basically, this game will be coming at you from *all* angles.

As will *Motor City Online* (www.motorcityonline.com), a

TASK BAR

THAT'LL DO SLICELY

Online gamers to get their own credit cards

***EverQuest* will soon accept 'game cards'. To play *EverQuest* you currently need a credit card, but game cards will soon allow those with cash to experience the bestselling online game of all time in 90-day increments. The cards will go on sale in retail stores in the autumn, and will be available throughout Europe, Japan, Korea and Australia as well as North America.**


Online credit cards, whatever next?



new title which is also in development at Electronic Arts. Its physics engine will allow super-detailed customisation of cars from parts obtained online. Michael Waite, the game's producer, describes this online racer as "dedicated to the worship of American classics, hot rods and muscle cars." He goes on: "The game keeps players posted on breaking news, in-game events, new track records, turf wars and dynamic info related to the player's rank and activities in the world." But that's not all, a 'club' system will allow players to pool resources to buy rare items from auctions: "They can share advice," adds Andy Beaudoin, the associate producer, "they can share cars and parts. On top of racing, community and customisation, lives a rich economy revolving around the internal combustion engine. *Motor City* has car dealerships, auction houses, trade forums and workshops, all calling for players to spend their hard-earned race winnings."

BOXED DEAD OR ALIVE?

Does this brave new future spell the death of the single-player, boxed game? Not according to Jens Bremmekamp at Reakktor: "Single-player games will not die. Perhaps they will change their appearance, perhaps they will be distributed differently. Sometime in the future you'll probably be able to log on and, if you want to, play a single-player session of some game, much like 'video on demand' works today."

Electronic Arts, one of the top boxed game publishers in the world, which also has a significant presence online, sees a strong future connection between permanent online games and online options placed within a boxed game. As Andrew Phillips, channel director for EA.com explains: "By putting online features within the boxed product we aim to increase the gaming community's reach and EA's potential to create communities." He goes on: "There are so many types of online gaming these days and our aim is to appeal to new audiences. It's also important to us in terms of profitability.

Phillips 'connection' belief is already being put into practice by Will Wright, the creator of *SimCity*, who is turning his technology into a form of *Sim* chat room. Graphically similar to the boxed game *The Sims*, Wright expects players to create their own groups, using standard *Sim* tools. They'll be able to group themselves by interests and hobbies – a Western themed town over here, sci-fi fans over there, a fantasy world somewhere else. "It'll probably end up like Disneyland where the players are building the rides," Wright says.

As well as mini in-games (such as Chess and Draughts), the new system will allow players to co-operate in buying land and services, and will integrate standard Internet services within, such as bulletin boards and instant messaging.



***The Sims* are coming online.**

...AND THE WINNER IS?

One intriguing strand of online gaming involves large LAN parties and lots of money. Take Quakecon (www.quakecon.org) which typically offers a $30,000 prize for the winner of the *Quake Arena* championship, along with your standard, super-sized 1,250 person gathering.

The Cyber Athlete Professional League (CPL) has plans to enhance this experience. It's announced that Valve Software (developers of *Half-Life*) will use its Multicast Spectator Mode at future *Counter-Strike* tournaments. The utility allows viewers to watch tournament action as if it were at a sports game or concert. In Multicast Spectator Mode, you can watch the tournament from a bird's-eye view or watch from either team's perspective to see what players in the game see.

There is a long road to travel before we all receive (low-cost) broadband and experience all of the advanced features listed in this feature but the future of the single-player game looks secure. Developers will have to adapt, to create games that are just as enjoyable playing on your own as they are hooked up to a server with a massive community. A great example of how a game is making the most of multiplayer gaming while still being enjoyable in single-player is *Black & White*. Playing the game on your own not only helps, but is essential to being successful online. "This is also great for gamers," declares Andy Reynolds, games producer for AOL UK, "as the games that they spend their hard-earned money on will be played months after they were bought and not just completed then stored under their beds." PM

TASK BAR

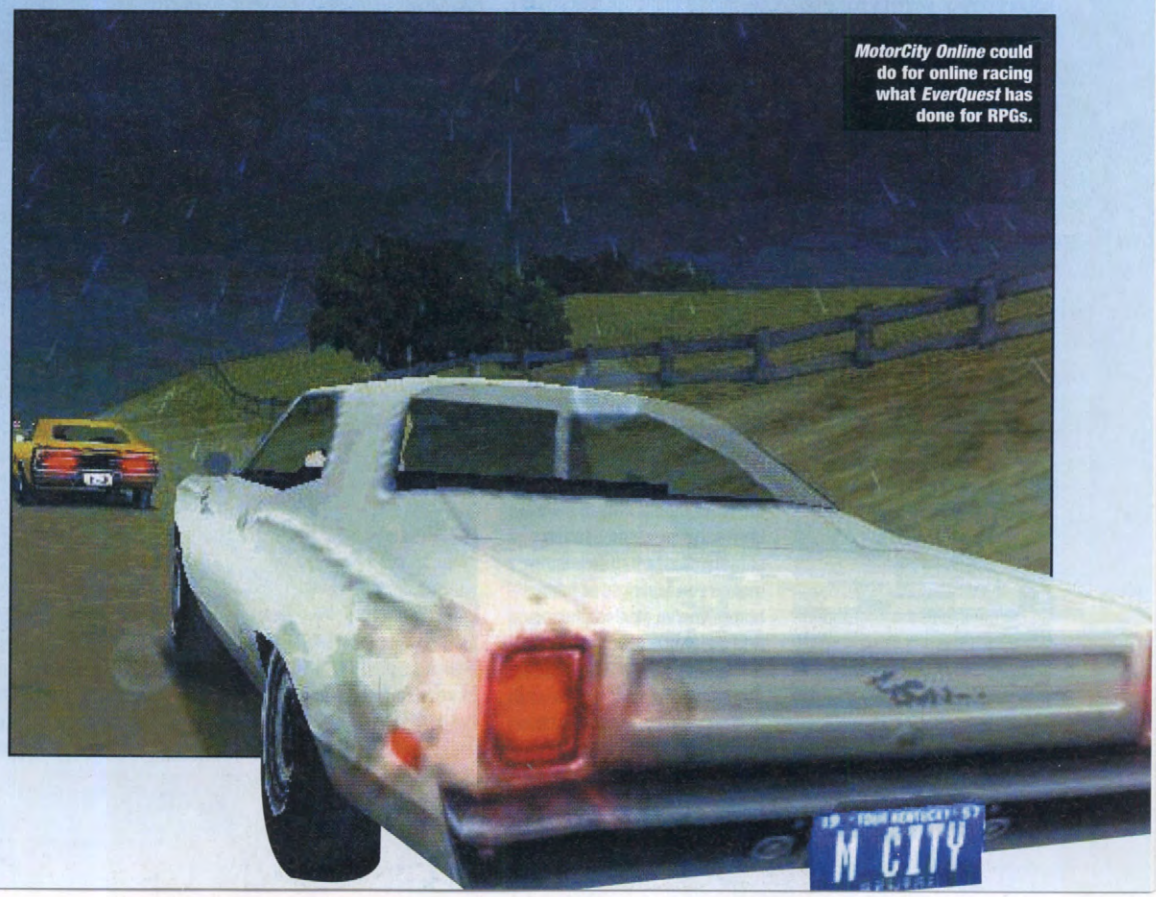
THE COST OF SPEED

It ain't cheap, but it's fast

BT openworld
www.btopenworld.com
500Kbps downloads
£150 installation fee
£39.99 per month

Telewest blueyonder
www.blueyonder.co.uk
512Kbps downloads
£50 installation fee
£25 per month, including cable modem rental

NTL
www.ntl.com
512Kbps downloads
£25 installation
£34.98 per month, including cable modem rental

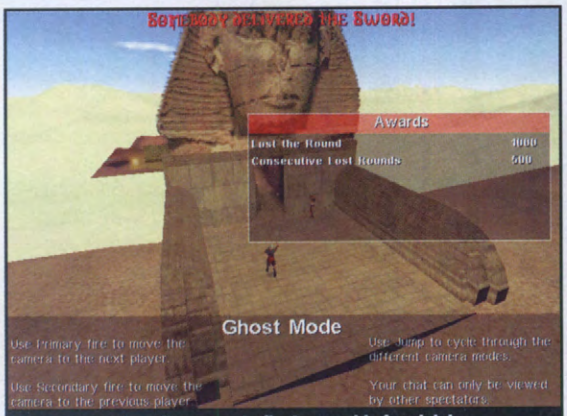


***MotorCity Online* could do for online racing what *EverQuest* has done for RPGs.**

LEGENDS OF MIGHT & MAGIC

£29.99 • 3DO • Out now

Might & Magic is back as a team-based first-person shooter. _Phil Wand_ pops on his chain mail, ponytail and some massive breasts



The game engine allows you to float around before joining.



Players appear to be very angular, and look as though they live in a concentration camp.

"You are nice tits," said the woman standing in front of me, the top half of her body tilted down at my chest, her head rowing left to right. She looked up, clumped me on the head with an axe and asked, "How are mine?" Well, they were OK I suppose, if you happen to like family size milk cartons, and so I whacked her in the face with my hatchet to show approval. Her axe swung back at me. "På den här servern ligger?"

"The indoor maps tend to be gloomy, claustraphic affairs"

There was another woman in the chamber with us, dressed in long green robes and some sort of ornate head garment, but all she did was stare dolefully into the next room. Who was she? Was I here to rescue her? With the axe wielding maniac still ogling my breasts, I wandered over to take an inquisitive swipe at her head to see if any blood came out. "Alla våra användares," or something like that, and fooompsh! Suddenly I was flat on my back with the scoreboard filling my view. Oh, right.

Welcome, _Magic_ fans, to the crazy mixed-up world of _Legends Of Might & Magic_. As you may have guessed by now, the new 3DO title is so popular with gamers – last count, 12 servers and 53 players – that the fastest host available is in the land of crispbread and suicide. This is something of a downer on team spirit, as many of your cohorts speak Swedish and don't respond to the most simple requests. "Where are we going?" or "Do you shop at Ikea?" is met either with deafening silence or a flood of gibberish that look like line entries from the Stockholm Yellow Pages.

As recompense, _Counter-Strike_ veterans – and indeed anyone used to the _Half-Life_ way of things – will not be the least bit fazed by the way the game plays. Not only does its default WSAD control layout make things that much easier for newcomers, allowing them to walk, jump and hack without having to open the manual, but the way you are able to switch between chase and floating camera modes before joining makes you feel right at home before you've started playing. Add the way you are rewarded for winning, and are made to buy spells, potions, armour and weapons at the start of each round, and suddenly it's everyone's favourite hostage rescue game with a Dungeons & Dragons tilt. You even have to sit out and wait for the next round after taking a hot sparkling one up the jacksy.



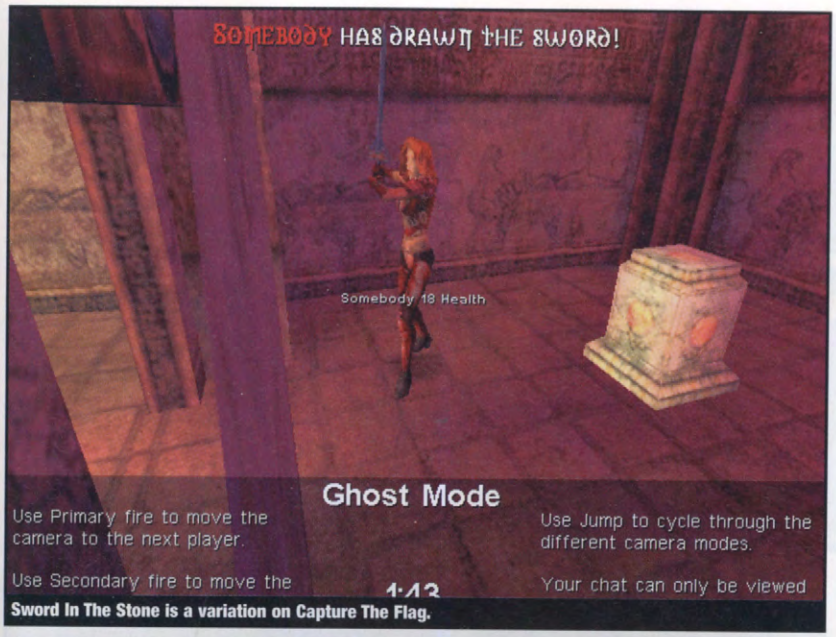
A horse with no horse poop? Come on, we want realism.

A NOD AND A WINK

Regrettably, any similarities with _Counter-Strike_ are immediately forgotten once the game begins. For although the designers have clearly given more than a nod and a wink to the world's favourite online shooter, they've spent little effort making sounds, visuals and gameplay lend their imitation any real worth. The graphics are below the standard set by _Quake II_, and made up almost entirely of straight lines meeting other straight lines – pretty much everything has a serrated edge. Player characters and animations look like draughtboard versions of Lara Croft, and the scenery behind them is one dimensional and lacking ambience. The indoor maps tend to be gloomy, claustrophobic affairs when compared to the airy, open spaces of _Half-Life_ derivatives (yes, alright, a dungeon isn't supposed to be inviting, but it should still feel expansive), and the outdoor maps have crap trees. The water swirls nicely in castle moats but it bears little resemblance to the real thing – whoever designed it was clearly trying too hard.

TOLKEINISTS VS COUNTER-TOLKEINISTS

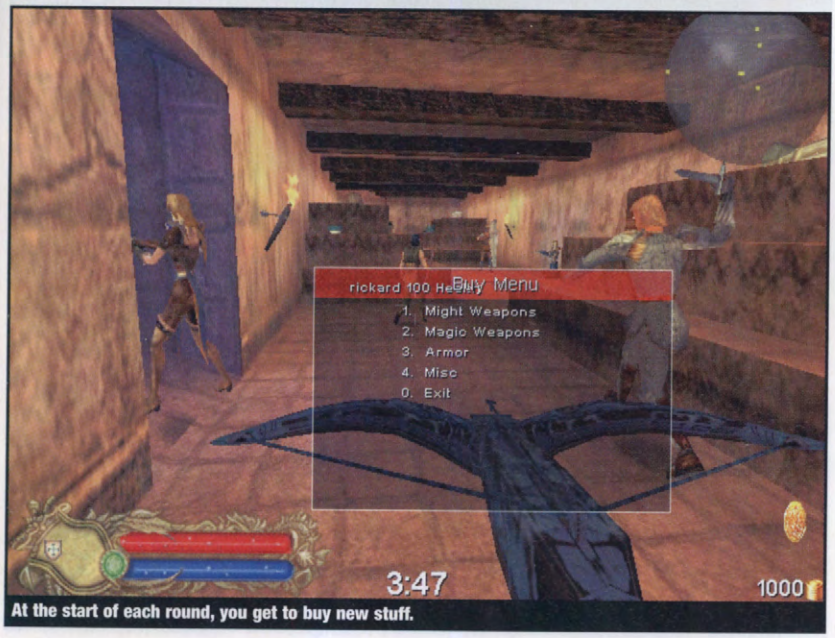
Each match boils down to a battle of good versus evil, and



Sword In The Stone is a variation on Capture The Flag.



"Hmph, like I care."



At the start of each round, you get to buy new stuff.

follows one of four different variations. In the Sword In The Stone scenario, a centrally located sword must be hauled from its stone and brought back to base. In Rescue The Princess, the good team must rescue a royal maiden and escort her away from the evil guys. Warlord Escape sees teams escorting a team member – the Warlord – to a designated point, and Slay The Dragon is a race to kill a giant, fire-breathing lizard before the other folks do. Rescue The Princess is the most enjoyable, no doubt due to its familiarity to both *Counter-Strike* and *Team Fortress* veterans, but Slay The Dragon can be similarly entertaining as, uniquely, the game focus is shifted away from simply piling into the other team.

When joining, you are asked which team you would like to assist, and then which class you would like to play. The Paladin and Warrior classes have a clear bias towards melee, which can make things rather hit and miss. Bringing an adversary down with your Berserker Axe often involves running around in demented circles, swatting the air wildly in the hope of making contact.

"It's *CS* played out in a fantasy land of spells, dragons, heroes and villains"

Sometimes it's truly satisfying; mostly we found it to be quite frustrating. Both have standard ranged weapons as a backup, but they really are nothing to get excited about.

The Druid and Heretic are a balance of melee and magic – the former class's Rod Of Souls, so called for its ability to heat-seek life forms, is fun in tight spaces – and the Sorceress is crap in close combat but had straight A grades at magic school. Lastly, we have the Archer, who is deadly with a bow thanks to his ability to zoom in on distant targets.

As well as using the opposing team for target practice, *Legends* will also spawn random monsters which you are able to frag – sorry, slay – in exchange for coins in your pocket, allowing you to upgrade weaponry and armour next round. Sometimes it's fun just to 'tag' one of these guys and have him follow you around the map snapping at your ankles – the idea being to stumble into an enemy base and, while they're busy trying to fend off its advances, bash them on the head with a hammer. Power-ups in the form of scrolls are also dotted around each map, giving players additional powers, such as the ability to turn invisible or jump higher. In this respect the game is more like *Quake*.

FINAL FANTASY

To sum the game up in a single sentence is easy: it's *Counter-Strike*, of course, played out in a fantasy land of spells, dragons, heroes and villains. While this may sound like a novel idea, and indeed something that may tempt you away from yet another round of de_dust, in reality it falls short for a number of reasons. First, it looks awfully dated alongside the *Half-Life* yardstick, and you can't help but sniff at a plainly lesser quality of workmanship – like Michel Roux on a visit to the office canteen. Second, the weapons are largely unsatisfying, with none of the squint inducing, heart palpitating, brain-drilling thrill you get from you-know-what. And finally, while there are a huge number of people who get off on fantasy, *Counter-Strike* and its ilk have proved beyond doubt that folks want a dose of reality. Firing crossbows at a scantily clad amazon woman with iron knickers and nipples like wheel nuts just doesn't cut it. As frightening as it may sound, real-world authenticity is the key to getting the adrenaline flowing, and so as a first-person shooter – something that should deliver stimulating hormones by the bucket load – *Legends Of Might & Magic* falls some way short. PZ

PCZVERDICT

UPPERS *Counter-Strike* for sorcerers • Online gamers will feel right at home

DOWNERS Lacklustre weapons and gameplay • Dated graphics • Nobody playing it

★★★☆☆

Not exactly wizard

BLACK & WHITE V1.10 BETA

£34.99 • Electronic Arts • Out now

Coping with one creature is weird enough, so how will *Keith Pullin* fare with thousands more online?

You would have thought that three months after its release and one patch down the road, things would be pretty hot around the *Black & White* server. Alas, this isn't the case. There are currently only six multiplayer maps, so it's no surprise to discover our bustling online Eden has yet to fully flower.

Despite almost 400,000 registered 'Gods', eight-player matches (with up to four teams) and a credit-earning Clan system, evenings and weekends are about the only time you stand a chance of finding someone sensible to play. But be warned: using a 56K modem in a game containing four or more players is a lesson in lag you're unlikely to forget. Get yourself a cable modem or some other kind of broadband connection though, and you'll reap the rewards.

"Using a 56K modem in a game containing four or more players is a lesson in lag you're unlikely to forget"

CAN I PLAY WITH YOU?

The European server is also dominated by Germans who in no uncertain terms make it clear that playing with the English simply isn't going to happen – regardless of whether you want to play with them or against them. Apparently us Brits "don't take it seriously" and always "quit when we're losing", which is in total contrast to the Germans who take it far too seriously and don't know when to stop. Still, it could be worse – at least there are no Americans. Although to be honest, the US server is probably a lot more fun.

The Internet can be a tedious place to play *B&W*; a LAN on the other hand is perfect. With no lag, no Germans and exactly the same game modes as the Net, the whole *B&W* experience is faster, smoother and more enjoyable. You can even attempt a bit of creature fighting and pop off some heavy-duty miracles without fear of the animation grinding to a shuddering halt and the screen melting.

CREATURE COMFORTS

But regardless of whether you're playing on the Net or a LAN, the real lure of multiplayer *B&W* is admiring or mocking other people's creatures. It's also quite satisfying learning new 'moves' by watching the astounding array of constantly evolving tactics. Hopefully, the imminent arrival of new maps, patches and various other add-ons like the football matches will make this part of the game even stronger.

The trouble is, novelty gives way to reality. The relatively similar maps and unrelenting desires of your villagers eventually make *Black & White* quite heavy going. Devoted fans will probably be able to cope with its demanding gameplay, but fringe players seeking a quick online thrill will look elsewhere pretty quickly. PCZ

PCZVERDICT

UPPERS Great to see other people's creatures • Can learn new tactics • Good Clan options

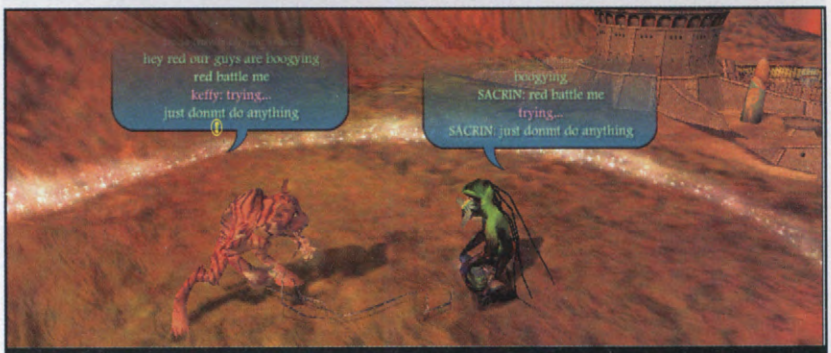
DOWNERS Fairly bad lag with a 56K modem • Needs more maps • Limited access

★★★☆☆

Something for the weekend



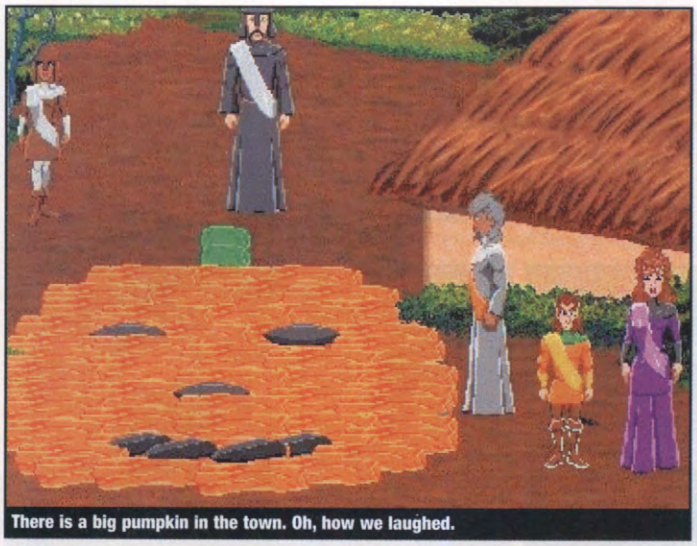
All this chat is too much for our glowing Mandrill.



Too much talk and not enough fisticuffs.



Not quite the fit, athletic tiger you'd expect to see in the jungle.


There is a big pumpkin in the town. Oh, how we laughed.


Yesterday's graphics, today.

THE REALM ONLINE

£4.99 (US$4.95 per month) • Sold Out • Out now • www.realmserver.com

Chris Anderson checks out *EverQuest*'s least dangerous rival

In the world of virtual reality videogames, the old adage that there is no accounting for taste is particularly true. After playing *The Realm Online* for a few hours, I am of the opinion that anyone who would waste their time playing this when games such as *EverQuest* and *Ultima Online* are freely available is clearly in need of psychiatric help.

The bland 2D graphics are at best rudimentary and at worst laughable. The combat system is truly awful. The interface appears to be designed to deliberately intimidate the players. As if that wasn't enough, there are only three classes to play (wizard, adventurer and warrior). Just about the only thing *The Realm Online* has in its favour is the fact you get to have your own house with a strongbox, where you can store all your possessions. This was one of the great things about *Ultima Online* that is missing in *EverQuest* (apparently the *EQ* engine cannot support this kind of thing). But this is the only jewel in an otherwise rusty and aging crown, and it will do nothing to appease online RPG fans who are used to better things.

I am sure the creator of *The Realm* put a great deal of time and care into the making of this game (a great many of the features from *UO* and *EQ* are present and correct in *The Realm*), and the fact there were actually people online playing it when I logged on shows it must have some merits hidden beneath its archaic exterior. However, if you are looking for a good online RPG, *The Realm* is not a worthy contender by any stretch of imagination. PCZ

PCZVERDICT

UPPERS Cheap • Runs on a ZX81 • You get your own house

DOWNERS It looks awful • Combat will make you laugh out loud • Limited class options

It's not very good

EMPEROR: BATTLE FOR DUNE V1.07

£34.99 • Electronic Arts • Out now • www.westwood.com

Daniel Emery was supposed to come up with a witty, sharp line to put here but he didn't, and we're blowed if we can be bothered to do it for him

It all started with *Dune II* (Westwood had nothing to do with the original *Dune* game). It all started going wrong with *Dune 2000* and now, with *Dune 3D*, Westwood has put a bullet through the head of innovation and embraced the concept of mass-market gaming like a long-lost brother.

Not that there's anything wrong with that, or indeed with bands like the Backalley Boys – each to their own. In fact, in the realm of multiplayer gaming, mass acceptance is central to success. *EverQuest* could be one of the worst games in the world (and, in my opinion, is), but if you have good people (and lots of them) playing on a regular basis, then that can go some way to ensuring you have a good time.

Unfortunately, no one is playing *Emperor*, or not yet anyway. On our last visit to Westwood's online service (at 3am GMT – prime time for online gaming) we could find only four people willing to get it on with us. Not good.

However, with its simplicity and pace, not to mention the simplistic 3D engine, *Emperor* is rather well suited to online play. Westwood has always strived to make its games easy to dial into and this new 3D *Dune* is no different. The gameplay is no different from the *C&C* series – what is unusual for Westwood are the graphics and the fact they are utterly without charm or humour. With *Tiberian Sun* or *Red Alert 2* in your collection there is absolutely no reason to play this online. PCZ

PCZVERDICT

UPPERS Easy enough to get to grips with

DOWNERS Dated graphics • Dated gameplay

Anybody there? Hello?


Find someone willing to play you...


...and you might just have a little bit of fun.

COMING SOON

HALF-LIFE DEATHMATCH CLASSIC (ON THE CD)

While we're waiting for news on *Team Fortress 2* and *Half-Life 2*, Valve has made our lives slightly more bearable by releasing this, a multiplayer mod for *Half-Life* that updates the game with all the sounds and weapons from *Quake*. It arrived too late to be reviewed in the Modwatch section, but we've stuck it on the CD so you can try it out for yourself. Aren't we good?

SILVER FORCES UPDATE



One of the sadly small number of mods around for gory shooter *Soldier Of Fortune*, *Silver Forces* has now been updated and the team says that this is the final big download (with only small patches to follow presumably). This latest version includes new maps, weapons and skins along with gameplay tweaks and a raft of general improvements. Find full details at www.planetsoldier.com/silverforces.

STRIKE FORCE UPDATE



Proving yet again that they have no concept of sleep, the team behind excellent *Counter-Strike* clone *Strike Force* for *Unreal Tournament* have announced that their mod is now up to version 1.60A (after an attempt to hit v1.61 failed due to bugs). *Strike Force* has always been a rival to the mighty *Counter-Strike* itself for sheer quality, and the new upgrades make it an even stronger contender for the Best Team Shooter crown. Check out the full details at www.strikeforcecenter.com.

MODWATCH

***Tony Lamb* leads the flock to mod pastures new...**



Damn I'm good...



Annihilation's maps are top class – you'd think you were there.

ANNIHILATION BETA 1.0

Requires full version of *Quake III* • www.planetquake.com/annihilation

Annihilation is more than just a mod. It's a Total Conversion that takes the gothic deathmatch style of the original, flips it about, and reassembles it as a World War II team/class game. No area of *Quake III* is left untouched and despite a couple of classes not being available yet and a few tweaks needed here and there, it looks like a classic in the making.

Having chosen whether to be a Nazi or Allied soldier, you must then select from a range of different soldier 'types' – lightly armoured fast-moving infantry, high-firepower slow-moving heavy infantry, medics or snipers. The Commander class is a new idea where each team nominates one member to take charge, decide tactics and promote within the team. It's up to the Commander to use his particular resources as best he can to win.

Annihilation has three game modes; Allies Vs Nazis Team Deathmatch, Rescue Albert, where the objective is to find and rescue Albert Einstein (yes, really) and Destroy Target, where each team has a bomb to plant, *Counter-Strike*-style, in a specific location.

The maps are a real treat, although *Annihilation* does need a good outdoors level to recreate a battlefield. Add to this the comprehensive and user-friendly menu system, great skins, weapons and sounds, and it all adds up to a top-class TC. When *Annihilation* gets some proper online support it should be a real winner.

PCZVERDICT

UPPERS Team-based formula • Usable vehicles • Great-looking maps • Informative website

DOWNERS Limited online support • Some classes unavailable

★★★★★

One of the best WWII mods around

HALF-LIFE: WANTED!

Requires full version of *Half-Life* • www.wantedhl.com

ON THE CD

As legend goes, *The Gunman Chronicles* was going to be a free release until Valve decided it was too good to give away, signed up the rights and charged good money for it. Obvious comparisons could be drawn with this latest release from Maverick and, although not as good as *Gunman*, it is still free to download (and on our CD this month) and much better than most other Total Conversions.

Set in the Wild-West, the 40-level campaign pits you against outlaws, provides new weapons for you to play about with, like the amusing bear trap, and a wide array of animals to try them out on. Bears, scorpions and pumas all stand between you, Rogan Black and the end-game sequence. As well as this, the game provides dedicated multiplayer maps and a variety of game modes, including Catch the Chicken.

We say watch out for Maverick. As a development team it obviously has its sights set high and is currently working on *Machiavellian*, its new FPS. Interested publishers should head to its website.

PCZVERDICT

UPPERS A single-player campaign for Half-Life • Multiplayer maps • It's free

DOWNERS Too linear

★★★★★

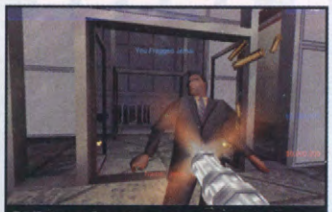
Ride 'em, cowboy



I feel like Anthony Hopkins.

OPERATION STINGRAY 2.01

Requires full version of *Unreal Tournament* • www.planetunreal.com/stingray



Bulletproof vests are no match for a minigun.



Sorry love, you're not flying dressed like that today.

ON THE CD

Operation Stingray is a team deathmatch mod where the usual two military sides are replaced by a National Security Agency team and a group of ex-FBI, ex-CIA and ex-KGB nutters called the Rogue Operatives. The latter are out to steal a series of NSA-owned laptop computers and plan on using them to steal huge wads of cash, while naturally enough the NSA intend to stop them.

Map-wise, *OS* is unusual in that it features more outside areas (in this case city blocks) than most, although the buildings are the intended battlegrounds, with much higher levels of detail inside. This means some maps appear unfinished, but it's early days yet and this will no doubt change as more buildings become 'playable'. Weaponry varies from Heckler & Koch personal firearms up to a minigun, RPG launcher and even a depleted uranium round firing beast called a Nuke 50 that stretches the realms of feasibility somewhat.

Only six months into the project, *Operation Stingray* is looking good. Give it a whirl.

PCZVERDICT

UPPERS Familiar style • Lots of potential • No respawn wait-time

DOWNERS Maps can seem unfinished • Needs more servers

★★★☆☆

Still early days

LIQUID 3.0 PUBLIC BETA

Requires full version *of Rogue Spear: Urban Operations* patched to v2.52 • www.planetrainbowsix.com/liquid

ON THE CD

Liquid Mod 3.0 is a huge add-on with a choice of more than 150 firearms. As well as the familiar shoot 'em up favourites you'll find everything from the vintage Garand rifle to the modern Steyr AUG-A2. All look, sound, recoil and impact pretty much like the real thing – a real joy for gun geeks everywhere.

This isn't the only trick in the repertoire of *Liquid 3.0*. Installers will also find 30 new skins available. You can look like anything from a SWAT member to a mad scientist… or even a porn star if you want. Naturally, some skins have advantages – SWAT body armour is even better at stopping bullets than the vast amount of silicone on the front of female porn star BJ Bunny – but these are niceties for the multiplayer game.

If you've got *Urban Ops*, patch it to v2.52 and install *Liquid 3.0*. You won't regret it.

PCZVERDICT

UPPERS Easy to install and use • 150 guns • Informative website

DOWNERS Any chance of some maps too?

★★★☆☆

Lots to see nothing to do



Night kit and minigun go well together – awesome.



Western Q3's train map – another fare dodger bites the dust.



Even reloading the Colt six-shooters looks good.

WESTERN QUAKE III

Requires full version of *Quake III* • www.planetquake.com/westernq3

ON THE CD

Western QIII is a mod that brings a dose of the Wild West to your desktop. Forget about cattle rustling or hawking great gobs of tobacco spit onto the saloon floor though, because this is Deathmatch, with you as Wyatt Earp taking on the Clanton gang all on your own.

Western QIII features period weapons, including the Colt Peacemaker, Remington lever-action rifle and a sawn-off shotgun. You can even lob sticks of dynamite around if you want to see some flying limbs. The sound effects are straight out of a spaghetti western and the character models are a well-animated bunch of suitably unwashed looking individuals.

You'll need to install the separate Bot file for single-player games if you want to get the best from the mod. Also make sure to install the little multiplayer patch for online fragging.

Not bad, but no *Wanted!*

PCZVERDICT

UPPERS Fun • Good maps

DOWNERS Needs more online support

★★★☆☆

Fun, for a while

COMING SOON

TACTICAL OPS UPDATE

Counter-Strike lookalike *Tactical Ops For Unreal Tournament* is now at version 1.6 with version 1.97 undergoing fevered in-house testing as a precursor to the public release of version 2.0. Included in this latest version are smoke grenades, new skins for the AK-47 and Mossberg shotgun, and the M4M203 assault rifle itself. Keep one eye on www.tactical-ops.net for the latest information.

FULL METAL JACKET UPDATE



The *FMJ* team is still coy about a release date for their Vietnam-inspired *Quake III* mod, but they're making progress and posting new information almost every day. We looked at an Alpha version a few months ago and the maps were tasty indeed, so this one is definitely worth watching for a public release. Check out the latest screenshots and development tweaks, or download their demo movie from www.planetquake.com/fmj.

ALIENS VERSUS PREDATOR

It has taken them long enough, but with *AvP2* not far away and the promo videos doing the rounds, Rebellion and Fox Interactive have recently made the original *AvP* code freely available to modders. So far limited almost exclusively to maps and skins, this means that hopefully we might see some full-blown mods appear for the scariest shooter about. Keep an eye on www.planetavp.com for the latest links.

HOW POPULAR?

Thanks to GameSpy, here's this month's list of the top games by number of servers: it's no surprise that firmly welded to the top of the list is, once again, *Half-Life*, with 10,703 servers. In second place is *Unreal Tournament* with 2,845, third is *Quake III Arena* with 2,311 and fourth is *Quake II* with 1,185. The also-rans are *Tribes 2* with 1,053, *Starseige: Tribes* with 486 and *Rogue Spear* with 266.

READERS' CHALLENGE

Want a chance to step on Shoemaker, hack down Woods or mow down Hill? *Martin Korda* tells you how

Sanity was once again restored, as we pulled off the narrowest of victories over Clan -D-M-C- at *Counter-Strike*. After five hard fought maps, the scores stood at one vitory each, with an incredible three maps ending in draws. With the result hanging in the balance, we were forced to play a sudden-death decider.

Using our four brand spanking new, in-office ADSL machines for the first time, we got off to a bad start by losing the first game (Office as Ts) and then drawing the next two maps. However, we took the fourth one (Militia as Ts), which set up a nervous finale. Of course, after yet another draw, one more map had to be played. After a brief discussion, it was agreed that we'd replay Dust to decide the outcome of the match. Things were slightly delayed as Dave came down with wrist cramp brought on by his gargantuan efforts and Richie had to be force fed lager in a desperate attempt to rehydrate him for the final push. However, once these problems had been sorted, we hobbled to a narrow victory to take the contest.



The scores for the challenge follow. Office (Zone as Ts): Won by -D-M-C- 9-1. Assault 2K (Zone as Ts): Drawn 4-4. Italy (Zone as CTs): Draw 3-3. Milia (Zone as Ts): Won by Zone 6-0. Dust (Zone as CTs): Drawn 6-6. Sudden-death decider, Dust (Zone as CTs): Won by Zone 7-3. Many thanks to -D-M-C- for such an excellent contest. Now bring on the next lot.



ZONE manage to take it in the sudden-death decider.

A NEW CHALLENGE

We're changing the set up from now on. Instead of simply printing a list of games you can challenge us at, we'll be selecting one game each month that we'll be accepting challenges for. So far, 99 per cent of the challenges we've received have been for *Counter-Strike* and we feel it's time for a change. So this month we'll be taking challenges for *Quake III* and *Quake III: Jail Break*. So long as we receive your challenge before August 16, you're in with a chance. The procedure for challenging us will stay the same though. We sill need your clan details (website, name), two daytime phone numbers and two email addresses, so we can contact you. Only send us a challenge if you're sure you'll be able to get a team together and stick to the date we agree with you. Also, make sure you all have access to a machine that allows you to play the chosen game online. Many thanks to those of you who have sent us a challenge, and we hope you'll all be up for taking us on at something other than *C-S*.

TO THE VICTOR GO THE SPOILS

If you win – without a hint of cheating – we will give your clan between four and six (depending on your team size) Razer Boomslang 2000 mice. They're worth £69.99 each and are probably the best gaming mouse around. It'll give you an edge no matter what you're playing.

FREE-FOR-ALL

The PlayingFields

Mon 13th Aug 2001

7:00 – 10:00pm

FREE-FOR-ALL

Unreal Tournament/Counter-Strike

THE NEXT CHALLENGE

This month we're only accepting challenges for:

QUAKE III

QIII: JAILBREAK

PC ZONE Free-For-All

GETTING CONNECTED

Get ready for some hot fragging action

Not in the main challenge? You can still get your arses whipped by joining the free-for-all. To join our *Unreal Tournament* server, click the 'Multiplayer' tab in the top-left menu and then select 'Open Location'. Type in '195.149.48.59:7777' in the box provided, hit enter and when prompted for a password, type in *pczone*.

To join the *Counter-Strike* FFA, from the opening *Counter-Strike* menu click 'Play CS' then 'Internet Games' and 'Filter'. Check the box for 'Are In My Favourites List' and uncheck the other boxes.

Now click 'Filter' again, and click 'Add Server' then type: '195.149.48.59:27016'. You should now see a server called 'PC ZONE Challenge' listed on your screen. Double click on this server to join it. The password is *pczone*.

Servers will be available for practice from 12noon. Maps will cycle every 15 minutes to allow everyone a chance to play, so keep trying. If you have any problems connecting, telephone 020 7388 0004 on the day of the challenge.



HAVE A GO

PC ZONE GAME SERVERS

Provided by www.games-world.net

The *PC ZONE* game servers are now more popular than ever and to ensure only *PC ZONE* readers can play on them, we've decided to password them all. Don't worry though, every month we'll be printing the password you need to get fragging.

***Quake III: Arena* Public Server #1 – 194.93.134.24.27966**
***Quake III: Fortress* Public Server #1 - 194.93.134.24.27968**

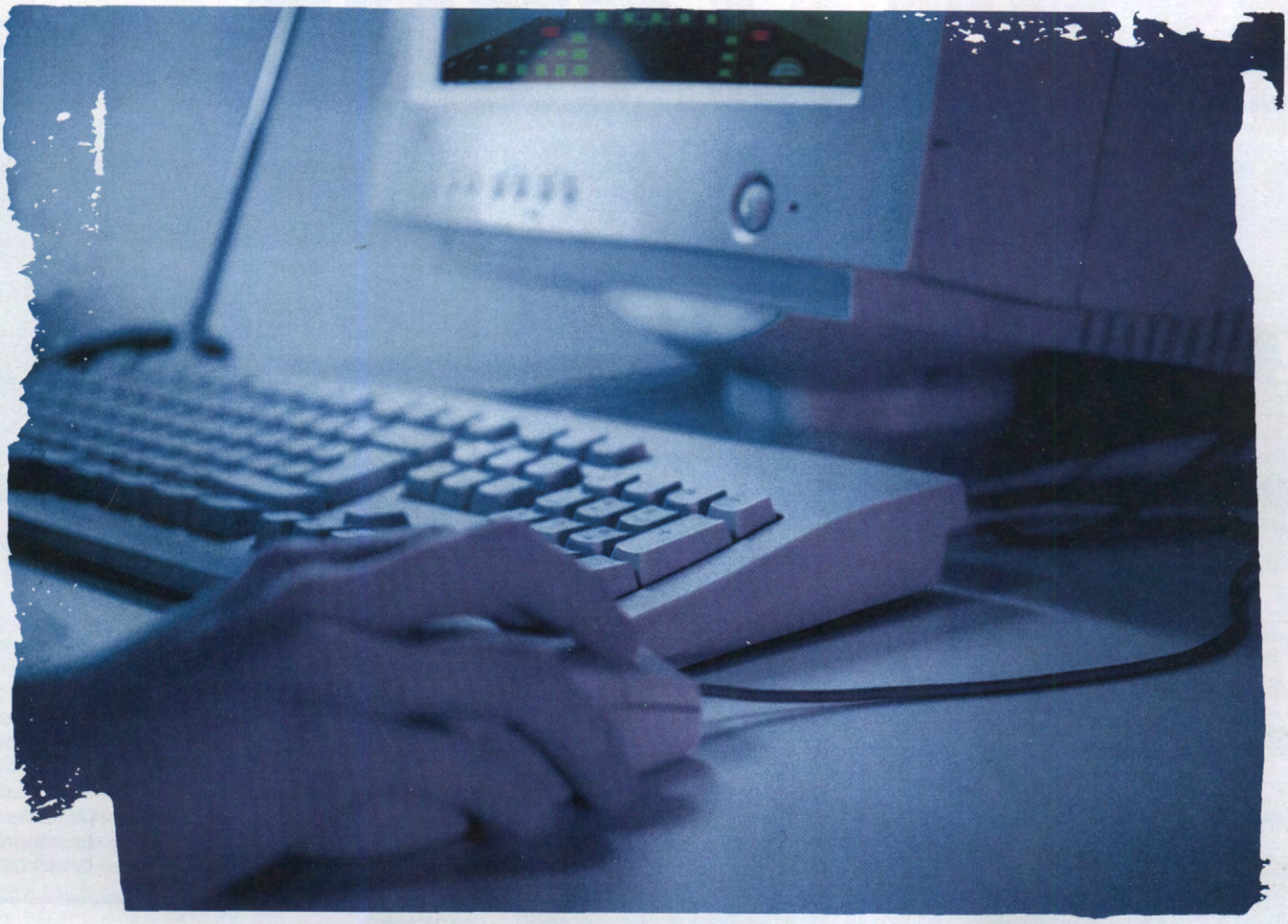
***Counter-Strike* Public Server #1 – 194.93.134.49:27015**
***Counter-Strike* Public Server #2 – 194.93.134.49:27020**
***Counter-Strike* Public Server #3 – 194.93.134.51:27015**
***Counter-Strike* Public Server #4 (*PC ZONE* map pack) – 194.93.134.51:27020**

***Unreal Tournament* Public Server #1 – 194.93.134.52:7787**
***Unreal Tournament* Public Server #2 – 194.93.134.52:7777**

***Team Fortress Classic* Public Server #1 – 194.93.134.50:27015**
***Team Fortress Classic* Public Server #2 – 194.93.134.50:27020**

Password: biscuit

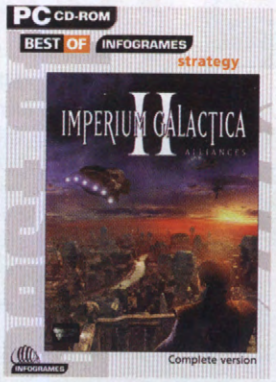
TRIGGER HAPPY PC



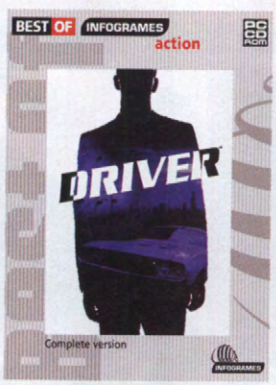
2 GAMES FOR £15



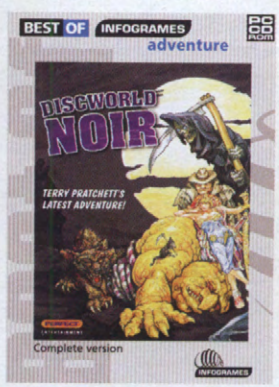
UNREAL TOURNAMENT



IMPERIUM GALACTICA II



DRIVER



DISCWORLD NOIR

LOADS MORE TITLES AVAILABLE IN STORE

WHATEVER TURNS YOU ON | Virgin megastores

Stickered products only, while stocks last. Prices may vary in Ireland

BUDGETZONE

Once again we delve into the bargain bin to see what's new and cheap

RAIDING THE PIGGY BANK Rhianna Pratchett, Martin Korda, Richie Shoemaker

GRIM FANDANGO

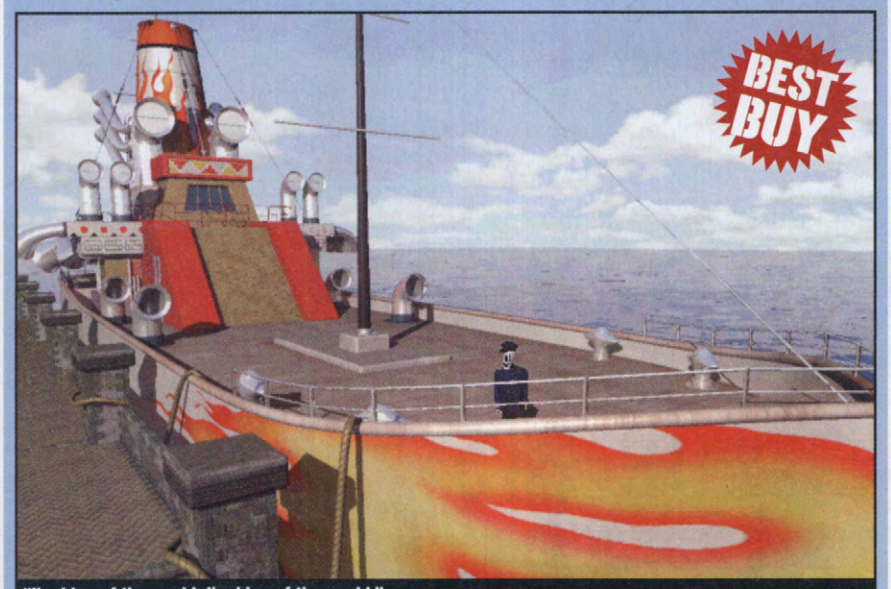
LucasArts Classic • £12.99 • Out now

PCZONE CLASSIC

Just when we were about to chisel out 'Here lies Sam and Max' on the gravestone of adventure games, LucasArts released *Grim Fandango* and the genre rose from the grave. If anyone was going to do it then it had to be LucasArts, purveyors of some of the funniest and greatest adventure games ever: *Day Of The Tentacle, Sam & Max Hit The Road* and *Monkey Island.*

Grim Fandango follows the adventures of Manuel Calavera, travel agent at the Department of Death, who flogs luxury packages to souls on their journey to eternal rest. The humour has more of an edge than previous titles, and combines classic film noir themes with ancient Mexican mythology and some amazing 3D graphics. A true classic.

PCZVERDICT 90%



"I'm king of the world. I'm king of the world."



He obviously hasn't heard: smoking kills.



Ohhh... lots of shiny things.

DIABLO

Best Seller Series • £9.99 • Out now

When it was released *Diablo* had the allure of looking like it had nicked all the best bits of other games (a dream interface and decent graphics) and honed them to near perfection, or watered them down, depending on your opinion.

Unfortunately, it didn't offer many surprises, but instead worked on our instinct to desire, bigger, better and shinier stuff. Whether you played as a warrior, rogue or sorcerer the premise was simple: run around and twat everything that looks at you funny. Classic stuff.

PCZVERDICT 72%

STARCRAFT

Best Seller Series • £9.99 • Out now

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

While it doesn't deserve to win awards for originality, *StarCraft*'s blend of impressive visuals and addictive gameplay saw it eclipse *Warcraft II* to become Blizzard's premier RTS. It wasn't the first game to use ideas based on three warring sides, but it still went on to become the definitive three-way RTS. Although it doesn't make it past the 'harvest, build, kill' pattern that has been the bread and butter of strategy gaming, it has retained much of its enduring playability and character.

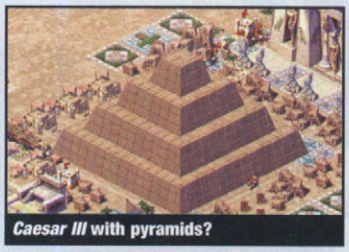
PCZVERDICT 80%



Still one of the best strategy games ever.

PHARAOH

Best Seller Series • £9.99 • Out now


Caesar III with pyramids?

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

Cynics labelled it '*Caesar III* with pyramids' as *Pharaoh* takes the enduring playability and gameplay of the *Caesar* series back to Ancient Egypt, land of sun, sea and slave labour. The premise is the same. Build up your city from a barren wasteland and provide your citizens with jobs, entertainment, protection and sustenance.

What makes *Pharaoh* challenging is the fact that many of your farms will be underwater for part of the year when the Nile floods, forcing you to think ahead and build up food stocks in advance. Although the graphics may be a bit twee for *Caesar* players, the gameplay retains all we've come to expect from a Sierra title.

PCZVERDICT 82%

CAESAR III

Best Seller Series • £9.99 • Out now


Friends, Romans, countrymen. Hand me your computers.

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

Caesar III is one of the best things ever inspired by the Romans, aside from the aqueduct, roads, irrigation, education, housing, sanitation, security and, of course, peace. Create a majestic Roman city and worm your way into the affections and pockets of your citizens in your rise to become Caesar.

Rather like spinning plates on sticks, you'll find there's never a moment's rest maintaining your city. As well as finding homes and jobs for your citizens you need to keep them entertained, spiritually enlightened and safe from local barbarians. It's hideously addictive, and well worth cancelling a few weeks of your life for.

PCZVERDICT 84%

THE CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND

LucasArts Classic • £12.99 • Out now


Would you trust this bridge?

We would have married the first two *Monkey Island* games, but then all the excitement died down and we feared the series had been forsaken. Then along came the third instalment and we all breathed a sigh of relief. Unfortunately, it didn't play too well.

The whole thing sticks limpet-like to the style of the first two games, but in this instance the cartoony graphics style doesn't do the main characters justice. However, the attention to detail, as well as the humour and the penchant for self-mockery are still there. It may be inferior to the first two, but it's still good fun.

PCZVERDICT 70%


Trapped in the church of Our Holy Mother of Pastel.

GABRIEL KNIGHT III

Best Seller Series • £9.99 • Out now

Unfortunately the game that adventure fans had been waiting for turned out to be a disappointment. Whereas the first two titles – which followed the supernatural adventures of writer and part-time occult detective Gabriel Knight – established a strong cult following, this third instalment proved to be clunky, graphically poor and laughable for all the wrong reasons.

Nevertheless, there's still enough in the game to keep die-hard *Knighty* fans amused for a few hours. It could have been so much better, but at the end of the day it's just another nail in the coffin of adventure games.

PCZVERDICT 60%

JEDI KNIGHT – DARK FORCES II & MYSTERIES OF THE SITH

LucasArts Classics • £12.99 • Out now


The Anchor Cow becomes a Jedi.

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

Out on budget, again (in funky new DVD-style box), this timely re-release comes off the back of LucasArts announcing the sequel. With that being some months off, this is about as up to date as it gets when saying 'Star Wars' and 'action game' in the same breath.

Not that it's a bad game, far from it. As you'd expect, the music and sound effects are spot on, as are the FMV sequences (not something you see much of these days). The AI, interaction, animation and the graphics are all rather basic, but there's one aspect of games like this that never dates: level design. This package is up there with the best. And at this price it's better value than anything else around.

PCZVERDICT 81%

X-WING ALLIANCE

LucasArts Classic • £12.99 • Out now


Fly the Millennium Falcon.

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

Easily the best of the *X-Wing series*, *Alliance* proved to be a massive hit among space combat enthusiasts, with its high-speed action and captivating storyline.

Although it starts rather laboriously, things pick up later on in the game. *Star Wars* fanatics will probably be most excited by the chance to fly the Millennium Falcon, while the rest of us will just buy it because it's a cracker of a space combat sim. If you don't already own it, then you've got no excuse not to buy a copy now.

PCZVERDICT 81%

FEEDBACK

Disappointed? Cheated? Outraged? We prescribe *Martin Korda*

> **"On the strength of the demo I bought the game and found it to be a little gem, certainly worthy of a stronger review"**
> ANDY BOYLAN ON *SUMMONER*

IT'S YOUR SHOUT!

Feedback is here to offer you, the player, a platform to voice your opinions on any of the games reviewed in *PC ZONE* over the last three months. Whether you want to sing a game's praises or simply give it a verbal beating, we want to hear from you. Remember to keep your comments between 50 and 150 words and include your name, address and age.

WRITE TO Feedback, *PC ZONE*, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1P 5FF

EMAIL Or you can email them to us at **letters.pczone@dennis.co.uk** with **Feedback** in the subject line

TRIBES 2

REVIEWED *PCZ* #103, Jun 2001
SCORE 87%

What we said

***"Tribes 2* is a vat of undiluted fun for team players and organised clans... The only downside is that it remains a little too focused on team tactics, meaning newcomers and habitual deathmatchers will feel wholly out of sorts."**

What you thought

Strange. I read your review of *Tribes 2* and thought its score was a little high, so I checked out some other reviews, and the average seems to be about 86 per cent. I just can't work out why the average is so high. I installed the thing and it froze up after I changed some of the graphics options, forcing me to resort to the old 'Ctrl-Alt-Del' option.

In game there's no weapon movement when you're walking around which gives the impression that you're sliding along the ground, and the jetpack seems to run out of juice a little too quickly to traverse some of the bigger mountains. It's also a pain in the arse just trying to get up the damn mountains. You can't look up and use the jetpack at the same time for some bizarre reason. Instead you've got to look forward and just thrust up, then try to move forward at the last minute which usually results in you missing the cliff/platform and falling down even further than you were before. The weapons suck and look very basic with a distinct lack of reflection. The ground also seems to fade in and out if you look down and move your head around – it shimmers and some of the textures seem to appear and disappear now and again.

On top of this, the vehicles are ridiculous. I was using some kind of Tron-like hoverbike and I could hardly see where I was going, which left me falling into this gap between these two cliffs. I was stuck for ages so I just gave up and jumped up the mountain with my jetpack. There's also this hover bomber thingy which requires a driver and gunner, which is fine in multiplayer, but in a single-player game you're stuffed.

I've also tried that whole skating down the hills and flying up to get some of that lift thing, but it still takes ages to get anywhere in the damn game. Those siege levels in particular are spread out pretty far and the Domination-like levels have towers so far apart that it takes years to reach all four.

As a multiplayer game it could be fun with players working together to fly the ships while others use the gunnery positions.



If you put get the team work right, *Tribes 2* is cracking good fun.

As it is, it's just annoying and if you're hoping for some offline bot madness like *Unreal Tournament* then you'll be sadly disappointed.

Tony Goff

While I do love the magazine, I have to argue with your review of *Tribes 2* in #103.

It was only given 87 per cent, and while that may be around the right area, the downfalls you describe are a bit confusing. The two you mention are 'Still a few bugs" and 'Needs team co-ordination to work'.

Now, if we compare *Tribes 2* to *Counter-Strike*, you seem to forget these 'Downers'. *Counter-Strike* is perhaps the most buggy game around, with cheats such as Bunny-Hopping (speeding around the level) and Wall Hacks (jumping or seeing through walls) quite common on servers. This happens even though *C-S* has been around for years, with many updates not sorting these problems. I do agree that *Tribes 2* needs teamwork to win, but I think that's a good thing.

Stuart Davidson (aka Milkshake)

Comment

OK, there's a lot of points here from both of you, and your arguments are coming from opposite ends of the spectrum. Let's start with you Tony. You don't strike me as a hardcore team-based FPS fan, as you imply you were looking for *UT* fragging action from *Tribes 2*. If that's the case, then I think you've missed the point. *Tribes 2* is *all* about teamwork over large, open levels. When Phil wrote his review, he was trying to be objective, and so saw this as both a positive and a negative. Many people prefer to jump onto a server and start blasting without having to mess around with intricate team orders. If you're like Tony, then you'll probably find *Tribes 2* boring, as its reliance on teamplay is unlikely to satisfy your love for manic fragging action.

In some ways Stuart, the teamwork in *T2* is an extension of *Counter-Strike*. Now I know what you're thinking. Why did we give *C-S* a higher score when *Tribes 2* has more advanced team options? Anyone can pick up *C-S* in a matter of minutes and enjoy themselves, and the huge number of *C-S* servers proves just how accessible and popular it is. However, *Tribes 2* is harder to pick up, and this will no doubt put many people off, a fact that has been reflected in the score. And yes, I know *C-S* is still bugged, but it's also free, so you can't complain too much.



Playing *Tribes 2* on your own isn't the best way to experience the game.

TROPICO

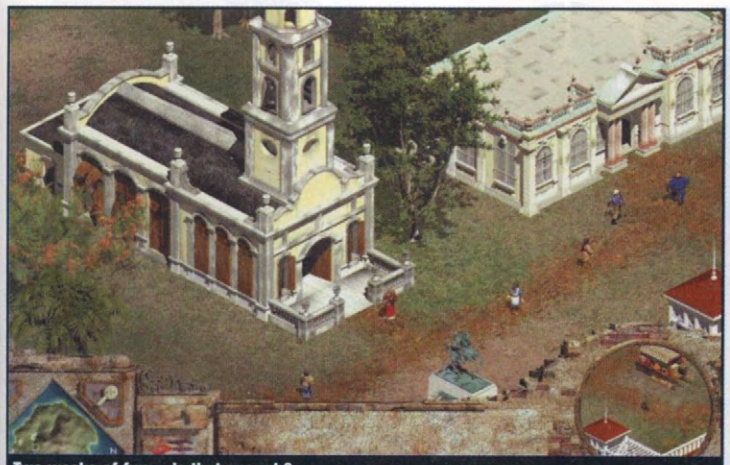
REVIEWED *PCZ* #104, Jul 2001
SCORE 59%

What we said

"*Tropico* is a disappointment, as so much more could have been done. And while the game will appeal to a small core of gamers who still hanker after *Railroad Tycoon*, everyone else will be left feeling just a little bit bored."

What you thought

I always swore I would never write in and complain about a


Two weeks of fun... Is that enough?



Tropico, not as good as it could have been.

score a magazine gave a game, but after playing *Tropico* I have decided that I must. *Tropico* is not the best game of all time, the graphics are not the best and admittedly not being able to turn the buildings around is annoying. Yet you still gave a game that is disgustingly bugged 95 per cent *(Black & White)*. *Tropico* is a highly original game and I think you have marked it too harshly, simply because of its graphics. If you give it time, then I think you'll find it's a great game, and one that deserves more than 59 per cent.

Gary Samaden

✪ While I agree with your review of *Tropico* to a point, I still think that you were slightly harsh with your score of 59 per cent. Don't get me wrong, I don't think it deserves an Award For Excellence or anything, I just think it's a 70 per cent game.

Not being able to rotate the buildings is annoying, and you were dead right in saying there isn't enough information about the important things. However, I still found it to be an enjoyable game, and have been playing it for the best part of a fortnight. However, I'm really starting to get bored of it now as it seems a bit shallow, although, two weeks is more fun than most games give you. Still, I think it deserves 70 per cent rather than 59 per cent, especially if a patch appears to fix the non-rotatable buildings problem.

Harold Moon

Comment

Seems a bit shallow you say Harold? Our point exactly. *Tropico* is a big name game, which simply doesn't deliver, and we're not about to start dishing out higher scores to games just because they have a large profile. If a game isn't up to scratch then we'll tell you. Sure, *Black & White* had its bugs, but these are rectifiable with a patch. Dan played the game for approximately 50 hours and felt bored for about 48 of those. *Tropico* is simply a poor game full of wasted opportunities and unforgivable oversights, and even a patch to sort out the non-rotatable buildings would only help a little.

SUMMONER

REVIEWED *PCZ* #103, Jun 2001
SCORE 70%

What we said

"Despite some unwanted chewy bits *Summoner* is ultimately a good game, but it's frustrating in the respect that it could have been a truly brilliant game..."

What you thought

✪ It's difficult to know where to begin sometimes, I mean 70 per cent in *PC ZONE* isn't a bad score, but it isn't a great score either. Being a diehard RPG fan, I decided to give the demo of *Summoner* a go, and was enthralled. The game played really well, and the graphics were incredible.

On the strength of the demo I bought the game and found it to be a little gem, certainly worthy of a stronger review, if not a higher score (I'm not at all convinced with the score you gave it). OK, so the storyline is stereotypical fantasy fare, but it has some depth. Granted, it may not be as good *Baldur's Gate*'s (*I* or *II*), but it's still better than many other RPGs.

But let's look at the graphics for a second. Here the BioWare classics are beaten hands down (as the review briefly mentions), in fact, the graphics are so good they make grown men cry. Gameplay-wise I can't complain – it has a decent, if limited, spell system and a competent combat system. Not to mention the interesting and original (for a traditional RPG) stealth sections, in solo mode with Flece.

If you put these elements together you have a much stronger package than *Vampire*. After all, *Vampire* is simple hack-and-slash fare.

I'm not going to ask for a score increase, but I will urge RPG fans to give this game a go and ask that *Summoner* receives a place in the *PC ZONE* Top 100, if it hasn't already.

Andy Boylan

✪ If ever there was a case for accusing a game for putting graphics before gameplay, this has to be it. Granted, *Summoner* may look pretty, but there's no denying that despite all its bells and whistles, the game itself is just a done-by-numbers RPG.

Why did the developers spent so long on the graphics and then not bother to put some speech into the game? Having to read lines of text is boring and when you think how great the dialogue in *Deus Ex* was, and how much it improved the game, it just shows how inferior *Summoner* is.

Sure, the summoning part of the game is quite cool, but apart from that there's little to recommend about this game. If anything, I'd say your score was too generous.

Kate Williams

Comment

It took me half an hour to compose myself before I could write this reply. Having taken another look at *Summoner*'s graphics, I burst into fits of uncontrollable sobbing, extracting enough snot from my nasal passages to make a snotball the size of a small child's head. Graphics aside though, *Summoner* is nothing more than an above average yet unspectacular RPG, with a few nice summoning ideas ripped off from the *Final Fantasy* series. The storyline is solid if a little 'stereotypical' and the combat is pretty standard fare. It's also a shame there are no voice-overs. There is fun to be had with it, but when compared to games such as *Vampire*, *Deus Ex* and *Planescape: Torment*, we don't believe it measures up. PCZ


It's official. *Summoner* looks fantastic.

GADGETS

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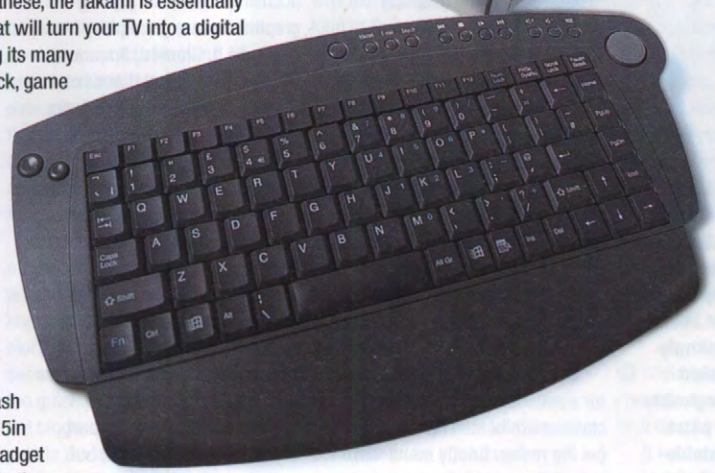
It's only natural in our line of work that we embrace all things new, shiny and technological. But then again, being such spoilt bastards it's also only natural for us to whinge about the problems of finding yet another space in the front room for yet another gorgeous gadget.

So when those charming people at Tiny mentioned the words DVD, MP3, PC, gaming and hi-fi we were suitably alarmed. But imagine our surprise when not five boxes turned up on our doorstep, but one. This wasn't the work of magician David Blaine, it was the Takami.

Meaning 'excellent idea' in Japanese, the Takami is essentially a stripped-down version of a PC that will turn your TV into a digital home entertainment centre. Among its many features are music and film playback, game playing via CD-ROM and Internet and email access. But its headline feature is its video recorder that enables you to store programmes on its 40Gb hard disk. The unit will also pause live TV and you can store music as MP3 files, either ripped from its CD player or downloaded from the Net.

The box comes complete with wireless keyboard, remote control and stereo speakers, but if you splash out an extra £500 you'll also get a 15in LCD screen. Or, if you're a serious gadget junkie, dig deep into your pockets for the 42in gas plasma screen with a DTS home theatre sound system – a snip at £6,999.

Whichever package you go for, it certainly isn't cheap, but then what price can you place on such compact, all-round entertainment? Ermm… about a grand actually. ★★★☆☆



One box does it all.



Swap all your scraps of paper for this egg.

CASIO MINI PRINTER

£50 • Casio • 020 8450 9131 www.casio.co.uk

You're at your desk, the phone rings and you need to write down a quick message. A simple task you might think, but not so. What you're faced with is a mission of epic proportions – the search for the pen. No matter how many biros you cram into your padlocked drawer, some tosser always manages to nick every one of them. It's a common problem, and one that, until now, has gone largely unsolved.

Enter the mighty Mini Printer. We're really not sure why Casio came up with this rather bizarre little gadget, but we love them for it. It's put an end to our frantic searches under piles of paper while some daffy PR breathes release dates into our ears. All you do is type the message on your PC (assuming you can find your keyboard), highlight the text, right click your mouse and you get a mini post-it note. You can fit around three lines of text on it, which should be enough to type 'Richie Shoemaker KEEP AWAY FROM MY PENS'. And if you can't even be bothered to type in your message, you can select words from the phrase library.

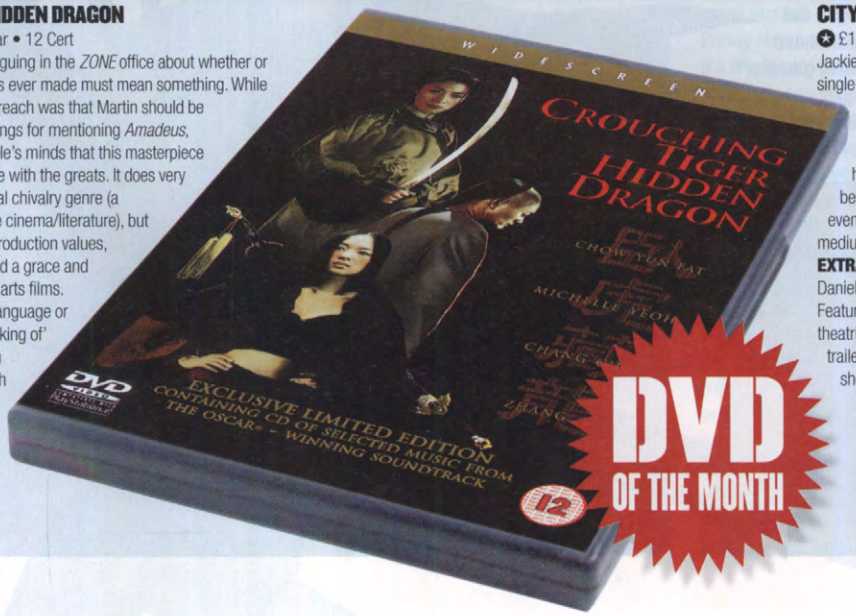
The 'egg' itself simply attaches to the side of your computer, but if you're after something a bit more subtle, Casio also makes a mouse that cunningly incorporates the same technology. Both have USB connection, and come with the necessary software and roll of mini-labels. And, more importantly, both are easily spotted should they mysteriously end up on someone else's desk.
★★★★☆

CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON

★ £17.99 • Columbia Tri-Star • 12 Cert

The fact that we were even arguing in the *ZONE* office about whether or not this is one of the best films ever made must mean something. While the only consensus we could reach was that Martin should be disqualified from the proceedings for mentioning *Amadeus*, there's no doubt in most people's minds that this masterpiece of heroic swordplay is up there with the greats. It does very little that's new with the martial chivalry genre (a mainstay of Chinese language cinema/literature), but sets itself apart with superb production values, brilliant fight choreography and a grace and subtlety rarely seen in martial arts films.

EXTRA FEATURES English language or Mandarin with subtitles • 'Making of' documentary, • Interview with Michelle Yeoh • Feature length commentary by Ang Lee and James Schamus (producer) • Talent files • Photo gallery • Domestic and international trailers
★★★★★



CITY HUNTER

★ £17.99 • Hong Kong Legends • 12 Cert

Jackie Chan may be making Hollywood muck these days, but having single-handedly created the martial arts comedy genre, and made some of the most entertaining films of all time, we reckon he can do whatever the hell he likes. This adaptation of a popular manga/animé character was designed to capitalise on Jackie's huge Japanese fan base, but ended up backfiring, essentially because it wasn't very good. But as any fan of HK cinema will tell you, even a bad Chan film is worth (re-)watching, especially on DVD (the ideal medium for skipping the arse jokes and going straight to the fight scenes).

EXTRA FEATURES Interview gallery (Jackie Chan, Richard Norton, Gary Daniels) • Behind-the-scenes footage and out-takes • Deleted scenes • Feature-length commentary by HK film expert Bey Logan • Original theatrical trailer • UK promotional trailer • Animated biography showcase ★★★☆☆



KODAK DX3500

£299 • Kodak • 0870 243 0270 • www.kodak.co.uk

There are many things in life we covet, but know deep down we'll never really afford. A house on the coast perhaps, or just a decent digital camera. But it doesn't have to be like that. While *ZONE* isn't sure of current property prices, we can confidently inform you that that the affordable digital camera has landed. And about time too.

The DX3500 is the first camera to use Kodak's EasyShare system, which aims to take the hassle out of digital photography. And it is remarkably easy to use. Just whack it in its Dock, press the button and the software will automatically open, and your pictures be rapidly transferred to your PC. From here you can email images straight to your loving fans, create slide shows and edit any dodgy images you may have taken.

And in terms of image quality it also delivers. Its 2.2 megapixels CCD captures images at a respectable 1800x1200, producing impressively sharp pictures. However, with just one other setting (900x600) you're limited to a capacity of 50 pictures on its 8Mb memory – and just 12 at high quality. Most annoying, but easily rectified with its Compact Flash card slot, which enables you to increase its storage space – for a price.



Smile please.

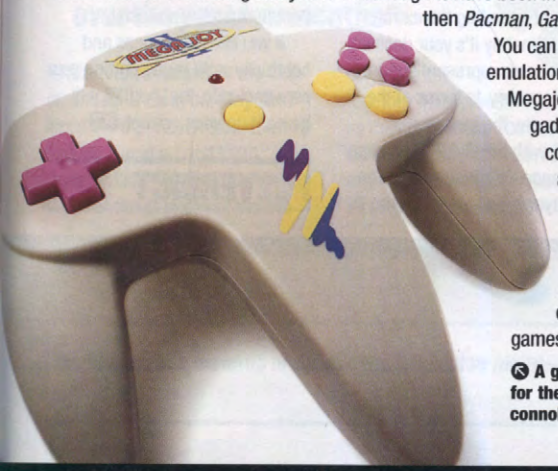
It's also easy to use when you've taken the photos. Images and menus are displayed on its LCD screen, which are easily navigated using the thumb-pad direction button.

Unfortunately, with its childlike simplicity comes its toy-like looks, but then at this price we're really not complaining. The DX-3500 does exactly what it says on the box – shares moments, shares life. Right on, brother. ★★★★☆

MEGAJOY II

£19.95 • www.htfr.co.uk

Retro's all the rage these days. Who's got time to spend a couple of days pouring over a manual just to find that there's a fatal bug which means you can't actually get past the install screen? Muck. Actually, we all have, but if you fancy a ten-minute blast on something and you're old enough to have been in short trousers around the time of the Two Tone craze, then *Pacman*, *Galaxians*, *Track And Field* are the stuff of dreams.



A gadget for the retro connoisseur.

You can get all of them to run on your PC via the wonders of emulation (see our feature on page 128), or you could buy the Megajoy II handheld, which packs 61 classic games in a gadget that looks remarkably like the N64 controller and connects to any standard TV. Gems include the aforementioned, plus *Tetris*, *Popeye* and *Loderunner*, along with plenty we've never even heard of.

Gaming heaven you might think, but there are a few drawbacks. The claim of 61 games is a bit much seeing as each *Track And Field* event is classed as a game in its own right. This would be a petty point if the versions of the games were faithful, but for the most part they're slow, clunky and the graphics look far worse than the originals. Still, at under £20 it's worth buying as a curiosity. ★★★☆☆

JUNGLE-I

£190 • www.mp3players.co.uk

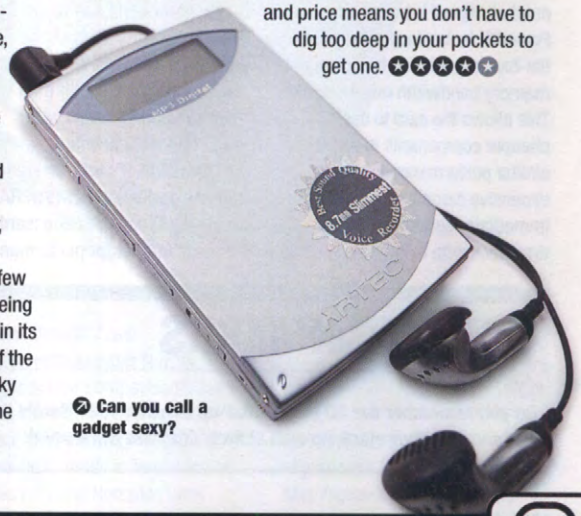
Since the MP3 revolution we've seen more players come and go through this office than we care to remember, or play with. They all claim to be smaller, sexier and smarter than the rest, but rarely manage to deliver. However, on the odd occasion one enters our sweaty basement that has that something extra, it's not unusual to see fists flung in a bid to bag the beauty.

Such was the case with the Jungle-i, a tiny player that looks set to shake up the MP3 market. It's roughly the same size as a credit card, yet its creators at Korean company, Artec has squeezed in 96Mb of embedded flash memory – far more than most of its larger rivals – although this isn't upgradeable.

The unit measures a measly 8.7mm in thickness and weighs just 57g (including battery), despite the fact that, unlike many other players we've reviewed, it's made of metal. So if you're prone to dropping, stepping on and generally abusing your gadgets, then don't let its fragile fascia put you off – the Jungle-i is decidedly robust.

It also has a simple user interface and sound quality is pretty good. But we do have one, very big gripe – where's the hold button? This is a standard in the portable music market, since without it you could find yourself looking at a hefty battery bill, as the player is likely to turn itself on in your pocket.

Despite this irritating blunder, the Jungle-i remains at the top of our MP3 wish-list. It looks fantastic, packs in a highly respectable 90 minutes of music, and both its size and price means you don't have to dig too deep in your pockets to get one. ★★★★☆



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TOTAL RECALL

★ £17.99 • Momentum Pictures • Cert: 18

Total Recall hails from the good old days, before Arnie films started being less exciting than *Gardener's World*, and before his cheesy one-liners were a thing of legend. *Total Recall* includes corkers such as "Consider it a divorce" (which he says after shooting his wife in the head), which lingers in the memory almost as long as the mutant woman with three breasts. While the special effects are looking a bit dated now, *Total Recall* is still one of the finest action/sci-fi films of all time. It mixes extreme excitement and unadulterated violence, with a well-scripted and at times chilling glimpse into a bleak, corporation driven-future. Get your arse to Mars, or a DVD retailer. You'd be mad to miss it. No really.

EXTRA FEATURES The original theatrical trailer • Special teaser trailer • Exclusive 'making of' trailer

★★★★☆



PITCH BLACK

£14.99 • Columbia Tri-Star Ho • 15 Cert

Atmospheric, sci-fi thriller with a relatively unstarry cast: Vin Diesel, Radha Michell, Cole Hauser. The survivors of a crashed colonist ship find out the desolate planet they've nose-dived onto has a night that lasts for 22 years and to make things worse, nasty things are waiting in the dark for them. The group of mismatched psychos, religious fanatics and characters with an obvious target painted on their backs must band together if any of them are to stand a chance of getting off the planet alive. Fast-paced fun with beautiful cinematography and guaranteed to make you keep the light on all night.

EXTRA FEATURES Feature commentary with director, producer, actors and visual effects supervisor, as well as production notes and cast files

★★★★☆



2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY – LIMITED EDITION

★ £31.99 • Warner • U Certificate

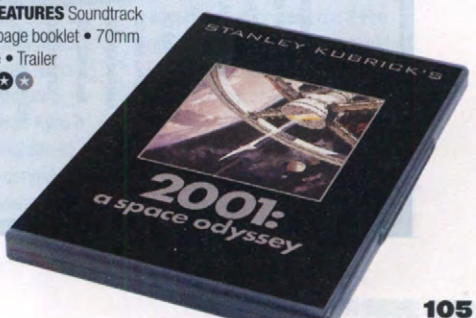
The most important science fiction film ever made is about as much as you can say about Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Chronicling the entire span of human evolution, it's a stunning piece of film work, thanks to the ballet-like space sequences and understated casting of the film's two main players, Dave and HAL.

As a Special Edition however, this oversized silver box isn't quite what we'd have liked to see. The quality of the film itself is exceptional, but apart from a trailer there are no special features at all. Why the producers couldn't have found some way to include the wonderful recent Channel 4 documentary is something of a mystery.

That Kubrick created a masterpiece isn't in doubt. How he did it is something that we'd liked to have seen more of.

EXTRA FEATURES Soundtrack CD • 16-page booklet • 70mm film frame • Trailer

★★★★☆



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***Tim Ponting* discovers XS-ive performance can come without an XS-ive price tag**



Less memory but pretty much the same bang for your buck.

BEST BUDGET

We reviewed the first video card based on ST Microelectronics Kyro II chipset in the July issue, the 64Mb Hercules 3D Prophet 4500. To complement this product the 32Mb Kyro II arrived, this time from PowerVR veteran VideoLogic. Technically, little separates these two products bar the memory capacity, so given the constraints of space we'd refer you to the original 4500 review on page 111 of *PC ZONE* 104 for the general low-down on Kyro II and what it offers. In a nutshell, Kyro II is based on PowerVR technology, which uses tile-based rendering to reduce the memory bandwidth requirement. This allows the card to use cheaper components to deliver a similar performance to more expensive cards that utilise immediate rendering. The main drawback with Kyro II is that it has no hardware Transform and Lighting engine. Games that support this run faster on NVIDIA based platforms that have hardware T&L support.

We've rehashed the benchmarks a little this month, adding a new suite of DirectX 8.0a tests utilising 3DMark 2001, and upgrading the motherboard drivers in our testbed 1GHz Athlon. Therefore, bear in mind that the results aren't necessarily comparable with the others, though to be honest, we believe the effect of new motherboard drivers is negligible. On the other hand, we've used the latest Kyro II drivers from the VideoLogic website, and they're clearly marginally faster than those previously tested with the Hercules 4500 board.

"The Vivid!XS was slightly faster running the 3DMark 2000 suite under DirectX 7"

This aside, it's interesting to note the additional 32Mb of RAM on the 4500 doesn't necessarily translate into faster performance, and at the budget end of the market this is significant. We think you're better off with a 32Mb Kyro II card, even though the difference in street prices between them is small. As you can see, the Vivid!XS was marginally slower than its 64Mb sibling in the *Quake III Arena* OpenGL tests and slightly faster running 3DMark 2000 suite under DirectX 7.

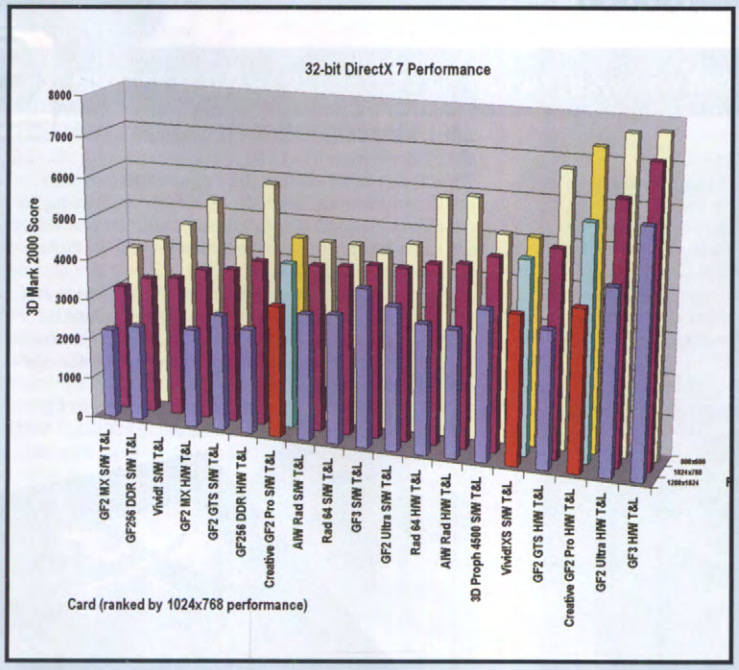
The new tests show Kyro II is less competitive against NVIDIA GeForce 2 based cards under DirectX 8 than it is under DirectX 7. However, at street prices typically under £100, this shouldn't be too much of a concern in current generation games. Although the graph doesn't show it, at higher resolutions the Hercules 3D Prophet 4500's extra memory begins to show a slight performance benefit. But enough to warrant spending the extra cash? Ultimately it's your decision, but both cards represent superb value for money. In terms of the retail bundle, the inclusion of WinDVD with the Vivid!XS just tips the balance. Although a software DVD player is included with the TV Out version of the 3D Prophet 4500, we feel the 32Mb VideoLogic board just nudges Hercules' 64Mb offering off its Best Budget Buy pedestal.

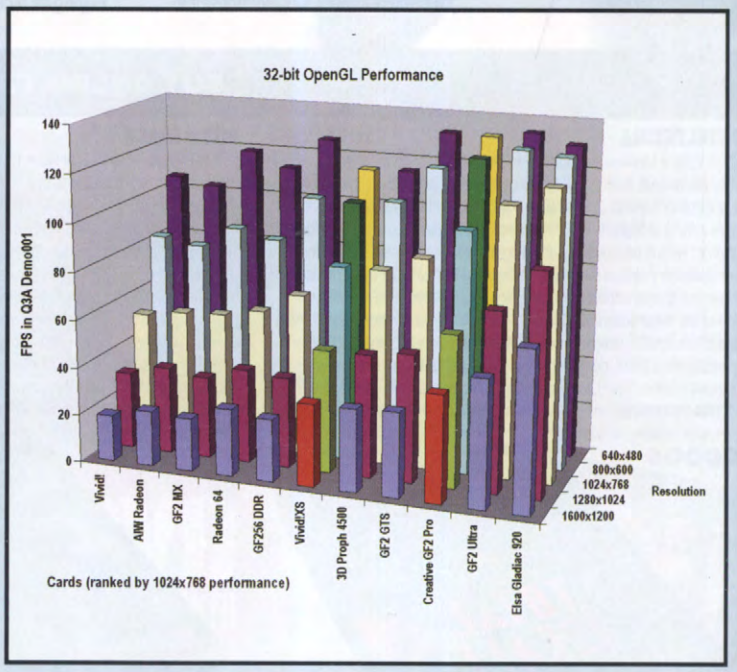
If you like Asda prices and habitually walk round patting your own backside, the Vivid!XS will be right up your... street. PCZ

PCZ VERDICT 90%

THE BENCHMARKS

Do you remember our 3D card round-up in issue 102? Here's how the two new cards stack up against the competition. Both cards are marked in different colours and you can see that they stack up well at their different price point





CREATIVE LABS GEFORCE 2 PRO

£179.99 inc VAT • Creative Labs • www.europe.creative.com

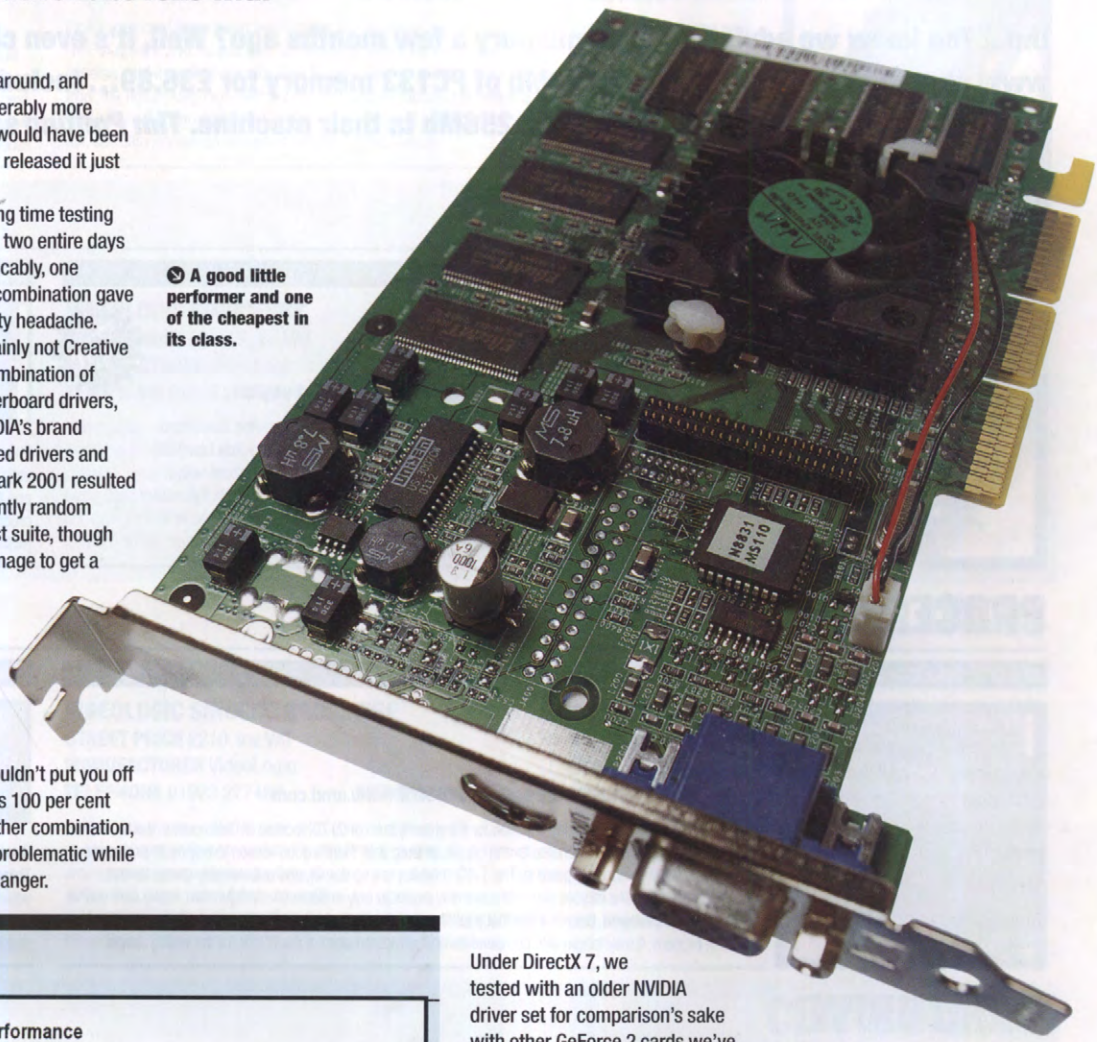
There's life in the old dog yet. Creative Labs rolls with a keenly priced GeForce 2 Pro

The GeForce 2 Pro is functionally identical to NVIDIA-based GF2 GTS and Ultra cards, but with different component speeds. The core is clocked at 200MHz, same as the GTS but slower than the Ultra at 250MHz. While its DDR memory is rated at 200MHz, unlike the GTS at 166MHz and Ultra at 230MHz. This clearly puts it squarely between the GTS and Ultra in performance terms, and in benchmarks as well as pricing.

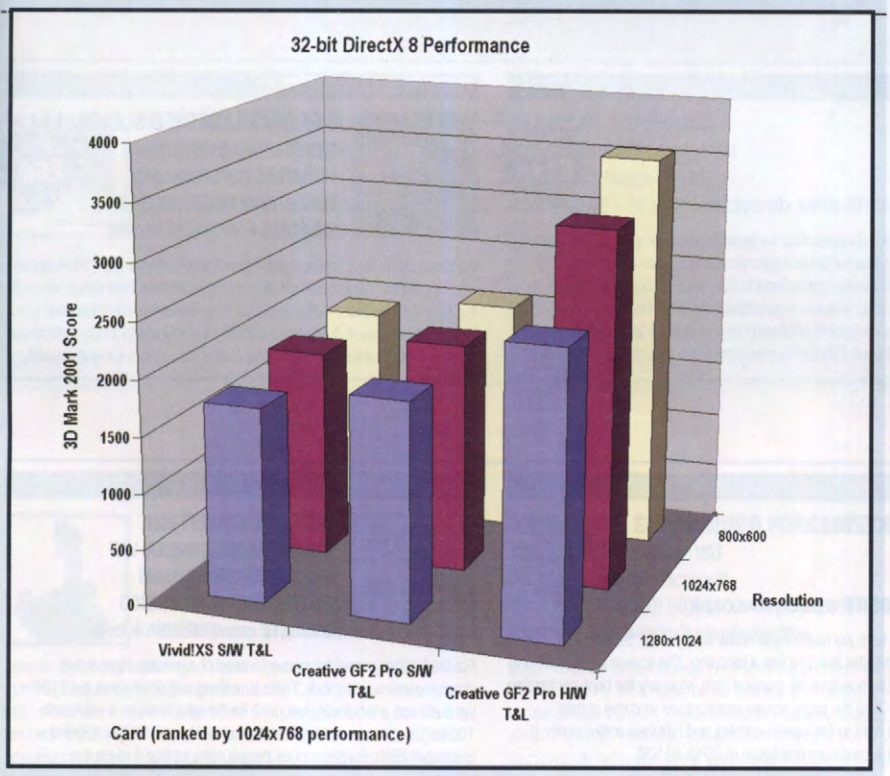
The prices of all NVIDIA-based cards have been dropping steadily over the past few months, especially the GeForce 2 MX and GTS/Pro/Ultra ranges. At the time of our round-up in the May 2001 issue of *PC ZONE*, GTS cards were weighing in at around £290. Creative Labs' Pro card can be found at street prices of around £155 if you hunt around, and as such is considerably more desirable than it would have been had the company released it just four months ago.

We spent a long time testing this card – nearly two entire days – because inexplicably, one particular driver combination gave us a major stability headache. This is most certainly not Creative Labs' doing. A combination of Via's latest motherboard drivers, DirectX 8.0a, NVIDIA's brand new DX8 optimised drivers and MadOnion's 3DMark 2001 resulted in regular apparently random crashes in the test suite, though we did finally manage to get a complete set together. This shouldn't put you off as the card proves 100 per cent stable with any other combination, and didn't seem problematic while playing games in anger.

"The price of all NVIDIA-based cards have dropped steadily over the past few months"



A good little performer and one of the cheapest in its class.



Under DirectX 7, we tested with an older NVIDIA driver set for comparison's sake with other GeForce 2 cards we've seen, and, not surprisingly, the card slots neatly in between the Asus GTS and Hercules Ultra cards we originally reviewed. This card is a stonker in games that support hardware T&L, running the 3DMark 2000 adventure test in high detail at just under 50 frames per second in 32-bit colour at 1024x768 – an impressive result indeed. As usual for NVIDIA cards, the Pro flies in the *Quake III Arena* OpenGL test, pumping out a staggering 100 frames per second at 1024x768 in 32-bit colour with anisotropic filtering enabled.

In DirectX 8, with the brand new NVIDIA driver set, tests are even more encouraging despite the stability issue. Even running T&L operations in software, the card out-performed Kyro II comfortably in all resolutions, although it's clearly considerably more expensive. However, unlike most cards we've seen, the hardware T&L engine runs 3DMark 2001's *Max Payne*-style Lobby demo acceptably, running at 1024x768 in 32-bit with high detail at more than 30 frames per second – compare this with Kyro II's score of less than 17 frames per second in the same test.

If you have money burning a hole in your pocket, this card is a top performer at an increasingly attractive price point, given the steady move to hardware T&L we've seen in game releases – and announcements – over the last year. Ultras are still extremely pricey for the slight performance advantage over GeForce 2 Pro or GTS. And from a quick trawl online, the Creative GeForce 2 Pro is one of the cheapest of its class. As such, we have no hesitation in recommending it. PCZ

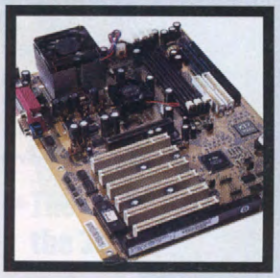
PCZVERDICT 86%

BUYER'S GUIDE

Um... You know we advised buying memory a few months ago? Well, it's even cheaper now. Check out www.crucial.com/uk and pick up 256Mb of PC133 memory for £36.89... including delivery. Because there's no excuse for a gamer to have less than 256Mb in their machine. *Tim Ponting* says so

MOTHERBOARD

BEST BUY



ABIT KT-7A RAID
STREET PRICE £130, inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Abit
TELEPHONE 01438 741999 **WEBSITE** www.abit.nl/english

~~£147~~ £130

Back in our Christmas Upgrade feature, we recommended the KT-7 RAID from Abit. Since then, there's been an upgrade to the KT-7A RAID. This adds support for 266MHz Front Side Bus (FSB) 'C'-type Athlons. Why are we not recommending next-gen AMD or Intel-based systems with DDR/RAMBUS memory? Because currently, the speed benefits are tiny compared with the extra cost. We like the Abit motherboard for its ATA-100 support (faster hard drive performance) and over-clocking potential. The chipset also has its own fan.

BEST BUDGET



GIGABYTE GA-7ZM
STREET PRICE £60, inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Gigabyte
TELEPHONE 01908 362700
WEBSITE www.gbt-tech.co.uk

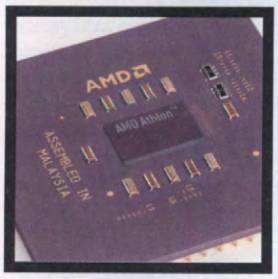
~~£84~~ £60

This is basically a sawn-off equivalent of our preferred motherboard, utilising the older chipset version (VIA KT133) and in Micro-ATX format – one AGP and three PCI slots. It'll take both Athlon and Duron Socket A processors of varying speeds, so has upgrade potential. I've used GB motherboards for years and found them the best of the cheaper brands.

PROCESSOR

BEST BUY

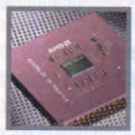
NEW ENTRY



AMD 1.4GHZ ATHLON
STREET PRICE £173
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE (01276) 803100 **WEBSITE** www.amd.com

You can now buy a 1.4GHz Socket A Athlon for the miserly sum of £173, located at Dabs.com in the UK. Athlon is still clearly the processor of choice for the gamer, at least until there's good reason to buy multi-processor motherboard/CPU combos for gaming. The 1.4GHz Athlon is a screamer, and unbelievably cheap for the performance it offers. As Athlons over 1GHz are only available only in Socket A configuration, make sure you've got the right motherboard. Bear in mind that you'll need to fit a hefty fan to keep the beast cool, and that it should fit properly. It may tangle with components on the motherboard or the PSU if it's the wrong shape.

BEST BUDGET



AMD 800MHZ DURON
STREET PRICE £43, inc VAT
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE 01276 803100
WEBSITE www.amd.com

~~£47~~ £43

Durons are basically Athlons with smaller Level 2 (L2) processor caches. This reduces overall performance somewhat, but still compares favourably with Intel's ageing Celeron chip cache structure. Besides, Duron still has the blistering Floating Point Unit (FPU) mathematical calculation speed, making it the processor of choice for gamers.

HARD DRIVE

BEST BUY



IBM DESKSTAR 75GXP 30Gb
STREET PRICE £110, inc VAT
MANUFACTURER IBM
TELEPHONE 0800 169 1458 **WEBSITE** www.storage.ibm.com

~~£145~~ £110

I find it hard to believe that you can buy a 30Gb ATA-100 hard drive for less than £120 – particularly one as excellent as IBM's Deskstar 75GXP. Mine sits in the heart of a hard disk recording system for music, which needs fantastic performance and unquestionable reliability, both of which it delivers. It has a rotational speed of 7,200 RPM (faster than some but slower than others – a good compromise between price and performance) and an average seek time of less than 8.5ms. If 30Gb ain't big enough for you, the range extends to a whopping 75Gb, though you'll need around £310 to buy such a beast.

BEST BUDGET



SEAGATE U SERIES 5 20Gb
STREET PRICE £66, inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Seagate
TELEPHONE 01628 890366
WEBSITE www.seagate.com

~~£70~~ £66

It's tough these days finding a drive that doesn't offer an ATA-100 interface – in fact, all the decent ATA-66 drives cost more than their ATA-100 equivalents! Seagate's fabulous ATA-100 U Series 5 drives redefine budget performance, featuring 5,400 RPM platters with a sub-9ms seek time. The 20Gb drive is a good compromise between price and capacity.

MONITOR

BEST BUY



IIYAMA VISION MASTER PRO 510 22in
STREET PRICE £676
MANUFACTURER iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745482 **WEBSITE** www.iiyama.co.uk

~~£720~~ £676

I've been a devotee of iiyama products for years – both my monitors at home are iiyamas, both are comparatively old, yet as good as new. The Vision Master Pro 510 has a stunning 22in screen (albeit with only around 20in of it visible). The tube is a Mitsubishi Diamondtron NF (Natural Flat), arguably the best-performing flat-screen CRT for the money currently available. Of all the large-screen monitors we've come across recently, it's the best all-rounder, with a tight focus right to the screen corners and fabulous colour purity. It also features iiyama's own Anti-Glare coating, and a maximum resolution of 2048 x 1536.

BEST BUDGET



HANSOL 710P 17in
STREET PRICE £160, inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Hansol
TELEPHONE 01252 360400
WEBSITE www.hansol-uk.com

For the budget-conscious gamer in need of a monitor, Hansol is a company well worth a look. There is nothing naff at all about the 710P – yet it still has a fabulously low price for the specification. It will handle 1024x768 with a vertical refresh rate of 85Hz, and 1600 x 1200 at a creditable 75Hz. For the money there's not a lot that'll touch this.

GRAPHICS CARD

BEST BUDGET **NEW ENTRY**



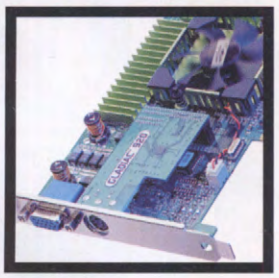
VIDEOLOGIC VIVID!XS 32MB
STREET PRICE £92 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER VideoLogic
TELEPHONE (01923) 277488
WEBSITE www.videologic.com

The new Kyro II chipset blows its slower Kyro brethren to smithereens at 175MHz clockspeed as opposed to 115MHz. Reviewed in this issue on p107, the 32Mb Vivid!XS replaces the Hercules 3D Prophet 4500 as Best Budget Buy – but only just, there's barely anything to choose between the two. The Herc has 64Mb and costs a few quid more... Dammit, you choose.

BEST BUY

ELSA GLADIAC 920
~~£350~~ **£286**
STREET PRICE £286, inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Elsa
TELEPHONE (0800) 056 3445 **WEBSITE** www.elsa.de/international/uk/index.htm

Finally, this card that's been Best Buy for the last three months is now available to buy, and with the new NVIDIA drivers, it kicks ass. The 32-bit colour performance is cool, the FSAA (full scene anti-aliasing) is blinding, and it's got all the nifty DX8 features you could want. We love it, and its price has dropped again from the ridiculously high RRP. It's the first card to support the sexier features of DirectX 8.0. Elsa's Gladiac features an S-Video socket for output to TV – a hell of a lot more useful than you'd think and comes with a full, specially enhanced version of *Giants: Citizen Kabuto.*



SOUND CARD

BEST BUDGET



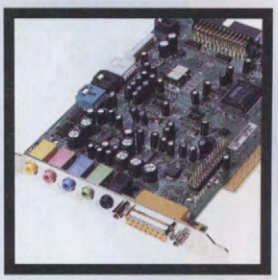
SOUNDBLASTER PCI512
STREET PRICE £45, inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE 01189 344322
WEBSITE www.soundblaster.com

As Creative's SoundBlaster Live! reaches the end of its shelf life, the company has released a cut-down version featuring the same chipset – the SoundBlaster PCI512. Providing all the bells and whistles required by gamers, this cheaper card represents superb value for money while still supporting DirectSound 3D acceleration and Environmental Audio (EAX).

BEST BUY

VIDEOLOGIC SONICFURY
STREET PRICE £60-75, inc VAT
MANUFACTURER VideoLogic
TELEPHONE 01923 277488 **WEBSITE** www.videologic.com

VideoLogic's SonicFury was the first sound card to utilise the super-efficient Crystal CS4630 chipset, and is still the best value for money. What's so special about it? The chipset, known as SoundFusion, is a multi-purpose Digital Signal Processor (DSP) that can be reprogrammed in software depending on the function it's being used to accelerate. As a result, it can give hardware support for up to 96 streams of DirectSound 3D audio, more than enough for today's crop of games. If you hunt around, you can also find an OEM version of the card on sale with no software bundle – a bargain at under £60.



SPEAKERS

BEST BUDGET



ALTEC LANSING ATP3
STREET PRICE £75
MANUFACTURER Altec Lansing
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.alteclansing.com

The only other multimedia speaker company we've ever had time for is Altec Lansing, whose decently priced products never fail to impress, even if they lack the hi-fi credentials of VideoLogic products. The ATP3 is a sub and two sat combination that delivers a typically meaty, crisp Altec sound. If your budget stretches, you can try the ATP5 for 4.1 gaming.

BEST BUY

VIDEOLOGIC SIROCCO CROSSFIRE
STREET PRICE £210, inc VAT
MANUFACTURER VideoLogic
TELEPHONE 01923 277488 **WEBSITE** www.videologic.com

Quite how many times this speaker set is going to appear in the *ZONE* halls of fame I'm not sure, but it shows no sign of being eclipsed in terms of quality for 4.1 gaming. By 4.1 we mean, front left and right and rear left and right satellite speakers, coupled with a big meaty subwoofer. The fact that this speaker set is rated at 100W RMS doesn't sound that impressive – but when you consider that you can crank the dial around 80 per cent of the way before they start to distort, you'll understand our fondness for these. And with 1000W Peak Mean Power Output on tap, the loud bits are, um, really flipping loud.



CDRW DRIVES

BEST BUDGET



TEAC CDW58EK 8X8X32
STREET PRICE £87, inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Teac
TELEPHONE 01923 225235
WEBSITE www.teac.co.uk

I've just had to buy a load of CD/RW drives and these Teac drives were dead cheap, easy to install and have worked without hitch. Bearing in mind my first CD-RW drive cost me well over £250 and was flaky and slow, these babies are a good deal. Make sure you shop around and you're laughing all the way to dubiously legal compilations...

BEST BUY

PLEXTOR 16/10/40A
STREET PRICE £149, inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Plextor
TELEPHONE +32 2 725 5522 **WEBSITE** www.plextor.com

Another one of those hardware recommendations based on experience. We've been running Plextor CDs, DVDs and CD-Rs for years in our machines, both at home and at work, and they're a) bulletproof and b) fast as anything you'll get within a few quid of the asking price. This is a brand new drive that is dead fast, offers Sanyo Burnproof technology and is competitively priced alongside some good contenders from Yamaha and Mirai. It comes with WinOnCD (nowhere near as good as Nero but proven) and offers CD-R, CD-RW and fast CD-Read performance. I'd upgrade, but my ancient SCSI 6x Plextor CD-R still cuts the mustard – three years on...



JOYSTICKS

BEST BUDGET



SAITEK CYBORG 3D GOLD
STREET PRICE £45
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE (01454) 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.co.uk

Despite the grungy website and horrible joysticks of yesteryear, Saitek's current generation of sticks are fabulous. The Cyborg Gold is a top-line USB stick that excels across the board. The design is superb, both strong and infinitely adjustable – even lefties are catered for – and its response and accuracy are unequalled, even among more pricey competition.

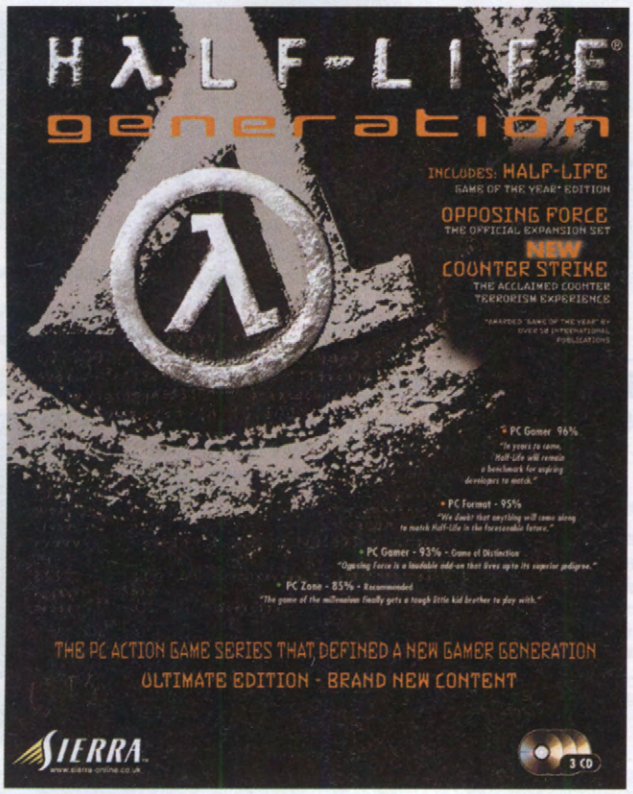
BEST BUY

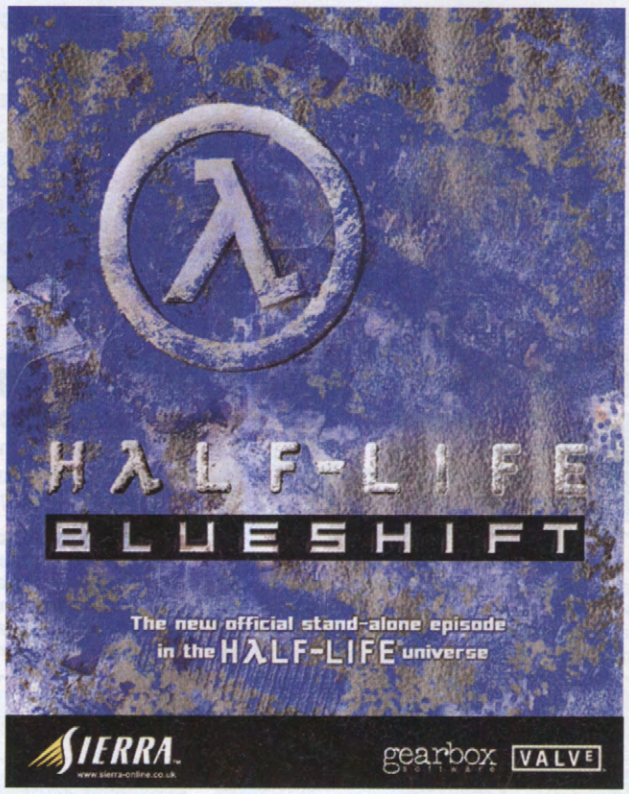
MICROSOFT SIDEWINDER FORCEFEEDBACK 2
STREET PRICE £65 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE (0870) 601 0100 **WEBSITE** www.microsoft.com/products/hardware/sidewinder/sidewinder.htm

Force-feedback products aren't everyone's cup of tea, but if you are interested, nothing comes close to the SideWinder FF2. It's a huge, heavy tabletop affair, with the power transformer built into the base. An infra-red sensor causes the stick to leap to attention when you gra$p it – I suspect my missus likes it for that reason alone. The force-feedback routines work extremely well – mainly because the motors are so powerful. If more games made better use of the technology, it would be a must-have piece of gear.



HALF-LIFE DOUBLE KILL





Buy both Half-Life Generation and Half Life Blue Shift for £29.99

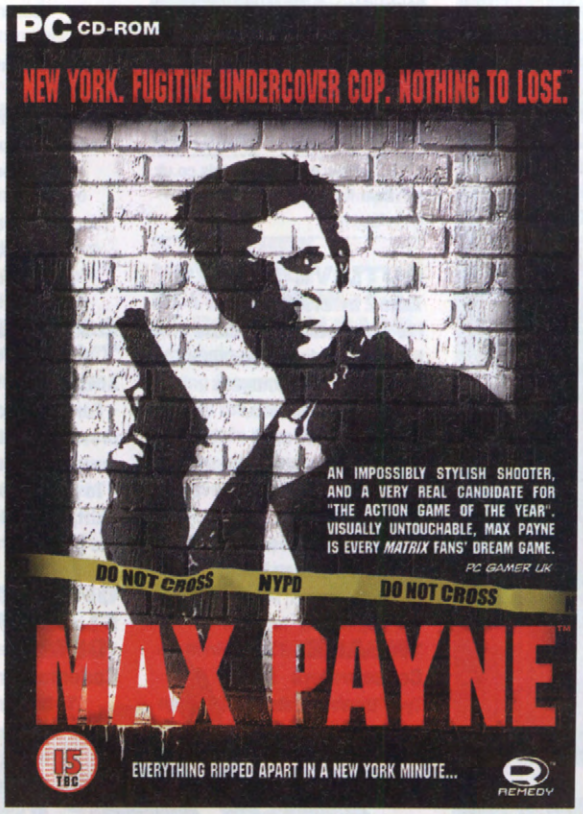
(Half-Life Generation £19.99 R.R.P., Half-Life Blueshift £14.99 R.R.P.)

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TO THE MAX









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- This voucher may not be exchanged in whole or in part for cash and cannot be used in conjuction with any other promotional voucher.
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TROUBLESHOOTER

CHART BUSTER

MIXING IT UP Rhianna Pratchett



The more observant among you may notice that we've been prodding, poking and tweaking *ZONE*'s Top 100 this month to try and get the most appropriate categories for our top scoring games. You may spot a few of your old favourites creeping back in, but most notably we've split the strategy games and created the category of god games partly in honour of our last Supertest, but mainly because the RTS genre is one that is constantly being redefined.

You'll also find that *PCZ*'s list of all-time classic games has been replaced by the all-time favourites of a member of the *ZONE* team. This in particular has become a source of much reminiscing, and the office has been filled with the sound of *Chuckie Egg*, *Mr Do* and Richie claiming that the mag should be renamed *Chuckie ZONE*. This is despite the fact that Richie's highest score is 22,000, while Dave's is currently 157,620 (so he claims). This month it's me who's lining up the best in building, butchering and beards.

IN TRUBS THIS MONTH...

112 CHEAT MASTER
That sneaky little cheat master, Mr Keith Pullin, shows you the way .

113 DEAR KEITH
Uncle Keith comes up with the answers to all your gaming gripes.

114 BLACK & WHITE STRATEGY GUIDE
This month we bring you Part Two on the best ways to keep your creatures under control.

116 DEAR WANDY
Need to find a solution to a niggling technical pain? Wandy is here to help.

118 WATCHDOG
Have you got a problem with a company? Let us know and we'll get Adam Phillips to sort 'em out for you.

YOUR HOSTS



Adam Phillips



Keith Pullin



Phil Wand

CHEATMAS

Politicians... sportsmen... They all cheat – so why don't you?

THE MAN'S A CHEAT Keith Pullin

NEED HELP?

If your problems persist, you can solve them if you...

WRITE TO **Dear Keith/Cheat Master, *PC ZONE*, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1P 5FF**

EMAIL **letters.pczone@dennis.co.uk** with **Dear Keith** or **Cheat Master** in the subject line

OUTLIVE

Take 2 Interactive

Hit 'Enter' and key in these lively codes for a good time:

#CAN I PLAY WITH MADNESS God mode

#BE QUICK OR BE DEAD Fast research and construction

#FEAR OF THE DARK View whole map

#FORTUNES OF WAR Add Money

1NSANE

Codemasters

Type these cheats at the main menu and away you go:

bigheadz Big head mode

boxerz Big hands and feet mode

ineedmorecars Unlock everything except editor

terraformers Unlock track editor

ineedmoremaps Unlock all tracks

fonekart Activate hidden level

gokartz Small wheels

bigfootz Big wheels

speedracer Speed up race

GOLF RESORT TYCOON

Activision

• For some extra money press Shift, Ctrl, C, A and T during the game

• To speed things up press Shift, Ctrl and W during the game

OPERATION FLASHPOINT (DEMO)

Codemasters

To become invincible start the demo and head towards the helicopter. Climb in, wait a couple of seconds and then jump out of the chopper just before everyone starts screaming about being attacked. You should now be totally invincible and can calmly go about completing the demo that way.

AIRFIX DOGFIGHTER

Electronic Arts

During the game enter one of the following codes for some flying/cheating-type tomfoolery:

Hybris God mode

Racerwagen Drive a car instead of a poxy plane

Autopilot Autopilot unsurprisingly

Hefaistos All weapons

Athena Maximum tech level

Admiral All medals

Slomo Slow down game

birgeroco Speed up game

Hades Lose mission

ICEWIND DALE: HEART OF WINTER

Interplay

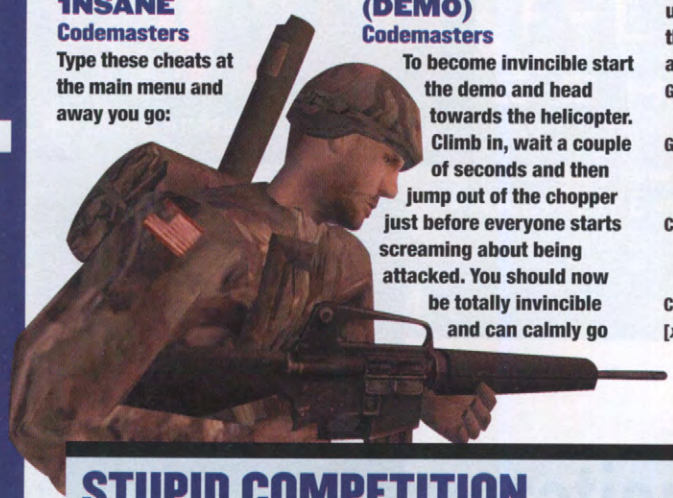
Press Ctrl and Tab to bring up the console and type these hearty codes exactly as they appear here:

GETYOURCHEATON:ExploreArea(); Show entire map

GETYOURCHEATON:Hans(); Teleport party to pointer position

CHEATERDOPROSPER:AddGold([*x*]); Add *x* amount of gold to party total

CHEATERDOPROSPER:SetCurrentXP([*x*]); Give selected character(s) *x* amount of experience points

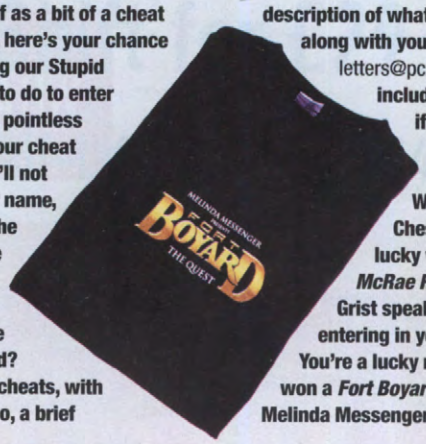


STUPID COMPETITION

Where cheating and pointlessness are qualities to be admired

So you fancy yourself as a bit of a cheat master do you? Well, here's your chance to prove it by entering our Stupid Compo. All you have to do to enter is send us your most pointless cheats. If we think your cheat is stupid enough, we'll not only print it and your name, we'll also send you the most ridiculous prize we can find in the *PC ZONE* prize cupboard. What more incentive do you need?

Please send your cheats, with the title Stupid Compo, a brief description of what they (allegedly) do, along with your name and address, to letters@pczone.co.uk**. Make sure you include all your correct details, so if you win we know where to send your special prize.**



Congratulations to Chris Wood of Madeley Heath, Cheshire, who is this month's lucky winner with his *Colin McRae Rally* cheat to make Nicky Grist speak in a squeaky voice by entering in your name as CHOIRBOY. You're a lucky man Chris, because you've won a *Fort Boyard: The Quest* T-shirt, Melinda Messenger not included.

TER



CHEATERDOPROSPER:Midas(); Add 500 gold to party total

GETYOURCHEATON:FirstAid(); Five healing potions, five antidotes and a scroll of Stone to Flesh

If that's not good enough for you, use a text editor to edit the 'icewind.ini' file in the game directory and add the line 'Cheats=1' **under the 'Game Options' section. When you start the game press 'Ctrl' and Tab to activate the console window and type** 'GETYOURCHEATON:EnableCheatKeys();' **to enable cheat mode. Now hit the following keys for the selected function:**

Ctrl+J Move selected characters to pointer position
Ctrl+R Heal or resurrect the selected character or portrait
Ctrl+Y Kill selected monster or NPC with no EXP
Ctrl+4 Display trigger polygons; shows traps
Ctrl+9 Display character bounding boxes

THE MOON PROJECT

Games Studios

We've already printed some codes for this but as Magnus Magnussen used to say: "I've started so I'll finish." In other words – here are the rest of them. While playing the game type 'cheater 1' to access the cheat mode and then type one of the following:

cheater 0 Disable cheat mode
idkfa Maximum shield, health and ammunition for all units
moonlight Disable fog of war
nobelprize Everything researched
sciencefornothing Free research
hide Enable fog of war
ultrascience Faster researches, depending on number of research buildings
gohome! Destroy selected building
judgementday Destroy all visible opponents
hereyouare! Display all opponents on screen
tromaville Damage all visible opponents
smash Kills all units at range of 8
newone [units/weapons] Free unit with a chosen weapon

STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE EXPANSION PACK

Activision

During the game hit '~' to display the console and type: 'sp_cheats 1' to enable the cheat mode. Now enter one of these codes:

God God mode
give weapons All weapons
undying 999 health and armour
notarget Invisibility
cg_thirdperson 1 Enable third-person view
cg_thirdperson 0 Disable third-person view
cg_thirdpersonrange [1-100] Set third-person view range
give [item name] Get indicated item
map [level name] Level select
noclip No clipping

EVIL ISLANDS: CURSE OF THE LOST SOULS

Ubi Soft

In the game press '~' to bring up the console and then type: 'thingamabob'. An 'Activated!' message appears and you can now type these slightly contrived yet wicked cheat codes:

@godmode(0,1) God mode
@godmode(0,2) God mode where all hits do damage
@givestrength(getunitofplayer (0,0),x) Sets new strength where *x* is number of points
@givedexterity(getunitofplayer(0,0) ,x) Sets new dexterity where *x* is number of points
@giveintelligence(getunitofplayer (0,0),x) Sets new intelligence where *x* is number of points
give 0 money x Give *x* amount of money
give 0 exp x Give *x* amount of experience points
fps 0 or 1 Show frame-rate
help Lists console commands

NB The 'give 0' cheat codes can only be used after the first town and on the camp screen. PCZ



Well hello there young lady.

DEAR KEITH

Storm clouds brewing over your favourite game? *Keith Pullin* makes the skies blue again

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Q You're probably being inundated with mail like this at the moment, but I don't know what else to do, so please help. I've got *Black & White*, and even though it's a great game it does annoy me. Basically, I find it impossible to satisfy the villagers. Now before you malign me for misunderstanding the game, can I just say that I'm an RTS veteran and I've never come across this kind of thing before.

Steve Lewis, email


Not everything in *B&W* makes sense.

A You're right, you could say it's a common problem right now and to be honest it's difficult to offer a solid solution. What I can say is don't underestimate the importance of the desire flags; keeping them low alleviates the problem slightly, however, you do need to get the timing right. For example if your villagers want to breed, only create one or two breeders. Likewise if they want food, only give them as much as they need. The reason for this is simple. The more food you give them the more they breed and the more they breed, the more food they want. It's a catch-22 situation that can easily spiral out of control, so go easy. I really hope that helps in some way Steve, good luck.

GRIT AND DETERMINATION

Q I have a problem with *Call To Power 2*. As soon as I play the game on the medium difficulty setting I seem to fall behind the other races instantly. However, when I play on the easier setting I can advance quicker than any other race without any hassles at all, so what am I doing wrong? I do hope you can help because I am very confused.

Richard Gritt, Harrow

A I don't think you're doing anything wrong, the reality is that on the harder levels the other races advance much quicker. Don't despair though. One way to neutralise their slight advantage is to establish your cities close to a tradeable goods square and concentrate on being an economic power rather than a military or scientific power.

THE HEAT IS ON

Q How do I kill Mephisto and the monsters surrounding him in *Diablo 2*? I've pretty much tried everything but I'm having no luck at all. I'm sure there's probably a simple explanation, but I'm damned if I know what it is. Maybe you can help me out…

Win Ling, email

A Mephisto is protected by Blood Lords and Council Members who use mostly fire-based attacks, so try and equip your character with something that resists these kinds of attack. When it comes to Mephisto himself, resistance to lightning is the key to defending yourself. Apart from that get in close and stab him or use cold spells.

GANGBANG

Q I know you haven't reviewed this yet but maybe you will have by the time you get this letter. I'm playing *Gangsters 2* and I can't escape the police. My gangsters always run straight into them and don't even try to avoid them. Why is this? Is it because my boys don't have a very good stealth rating?

Chris "The Don" Herring, Newport

A Er, no. They're just thick actually. The best advice is to take the widest berth possible around police stations and patrol routes. If that fails and they continue to get themselves banged up, Plan B is much simpler: shoot the Feds with a Tommy gun – it works for me.

BLACK & WHITE

STRATEGY GUIDE – PART TWO

Problems with a big hairy oaf that won't do what you say? Yes, Keith Pullin can be a bit of a handful, just like the creatures in *Black & White*

A SHADE OF GREY Keith Pullin

The second part of our *Black & White* guide looks at the different ways to educate your creature. We look at everything from eating habits, to relationships with other creatures, Gods and villagers. So, get that lead on and start teaching.

VITAL STATISTICS

As with any living thing there are basic needs and instincts that help your creature survive. When its energy is depleted it cannot cast any more miracles. In order to charge it up you must rest and feed your creature.

However, if any other statistics such as hunger or tiredness reach maximum your creature will collapse. It then automatically returns to its pen to recuperate. If your creature has passed out from starvation you will almost certainly have to feed it straight away. If it collapses regularly it will shrink in size. Remember to also constantly exercise your creature by giving it rocks to carry. This keeps its strength up and is a bonus in battle.

Creatures automatically sleep when they are tired, however they don't always go to their pen to do so. Reward your creature for resting in its pen and punish it when it sleeps in the open. Also, only let a creature rest when it's more than 75 per cent tired, otherwise it becomes lazy.

Encourage your creature to find a particular food source and stick to it. In most cases fish is the logical choice. Just wait until it eats and then stroke its belly to make it instinctively return. The great thing about getting it to eat fish is that it can also drink at the same time. Also remember that your creature can drink from streams and rivers in a dehydration emergency.

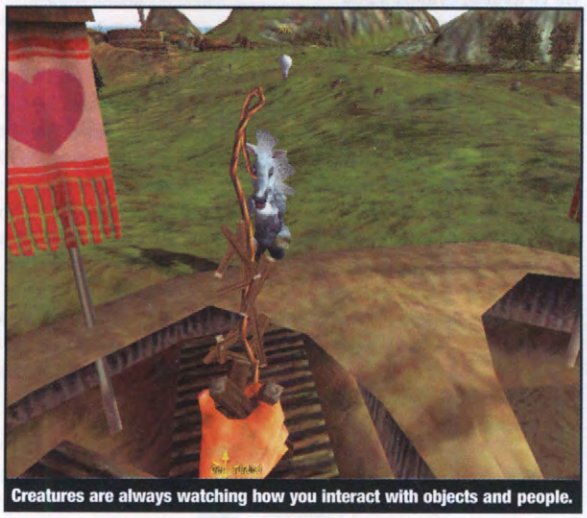
Your creature will vomit anything that's bad for him. Even so, always give him a quick slap for trying to eat things like trees, rocks and unripe crops.



Energy should always remain high.



Stroke your creature whenever it drinks water near fish.



Creatures are always watching how you interact with objects and people.

WE KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING...

Although your creature is undoubtedly intelligent its mind works in peculiar ways, so knowing what's going on in that strange brain can help immensely. Pay attention to its mood. Don't let a creature hang around villages if it's pissed off – that's asking for trouble. On the other hand, if the big old softy is feeling playful or wants to be generous the village is the perfect place to be.

Your creature is also surprisingly attentive – even when off the leash. It's always watching you – in every possible way; it watches what you pick up, what you do with it and whether you are violent or passive. Literally nothing escapes the notice of your creature – even when he's doing something else. Subsequently if your creature starts acting strange, it's probably because you inadvertently taught it to.

If a creature is unsure what to do with an object, it will toss it away, (this is very different to deliberately throwingsomething). Never punish your creature for this, even if the object does smash a house or kill a villager when it lands; it was a reflex action and was not evil. Wait instead until the creature learns how to use an object correctly and then reward him for it.

Likewise, be careful when punishing creatures for shitting. Slapping them for doing their business up against houses is fair enough, but you should actually reward them for crapping in forests. There's also a rumour that relieving themselves in fields fertilises crops and increases the rate of growth...



Do not let your giant proteges crap in villages.

INTERACTING WITH VILLAGERS

When a creature feels friendly towards villagers it is likely to turn them into breeders. While this has its benefits if your population is dwindling it can also be a nightmare if you have enough people already. If your creature is creating too many breeders lead it away from the village, otherwise overcrowding leads to all sorts of problems.

Villagers are eaten by your creature when it's feeling angry and hungry, give it a good slap for doing this as a hungry creature can devour a village in minutes, which is not good.



If you want your creature to dance with villagers just lead him into the village with the fluffy leash of compassion on.



Your creature will view the villagers around him as friends, enemies, food or playthings.

DIRECT ACTION

Every time your creature throws stuff it's usually for a helpful reason. But throwing stuff is basically evil, so if you want your creature to remain good slap him when he does lob something.

On the other hand if you throw wood or grain into the store, your creature eventually starts copying. With more and more practice he can throw stuff into the store from quite a distance – let it, as this is without doubt a good action.

You can teach your creature to catch by throwing a beach ball at it when it's in a playful mood. With



Throwing, kicking and catching... your creature can learn all of these.

extensive training creatures can be taught to catch fireballs and hurl them back at an enemy. If it can do this there is not a lot that can stand in its way. The beach ball can also be used to teach your creature to kick things. Again, with enough practice it will even kick rocks at enemies. Unfortunately, it does tend to kick animals and villagers around too, so give it a good slap when that happens, unless it's playing football of course.

Remember, your creature is observant; it looks at what you've thrown, where you've thrown it and whether you return it to its original position.


Don't leave the first land without your creature knowing about the village store.

ON DUTY

After some time creatures learn to take care of themselves very well. If they have been set alight after being hit by a fireball or lightning bolt they extinguish themselves providing they know how to use the impressive water miracle. Likewise if they're badly damaged they cast the heal miracle on themselves. Basically, the more miracles a creature knows about the more it is likely to apply those miracles in a variety of situations.

Remember also that a creature impresses villagers simply by being near them. If you combine this proximity with actions that help the villagers your creature becomes an invaluable weapon in your quest to take over the land of Eden.

As a general rule, your creature instantly starts doing helpful things if you lead it into a village with the fluffy leash of compassion on. Although far from being a slave, creatures can work their way into the hearts of villagers, especially if it is constantly on hand to heal them and water their crops.

Feeding worshippers is one of the most important errands a creature can perform. Put the leash of learning on and double click on the food desire flag at the worship site to tether your creature to it. Every time the flag rises it should create a food miracle.


Try and get your creature to help out in general village life.


Benevolent acts include watering crops, healing villagers and creating food miracles at the village store.

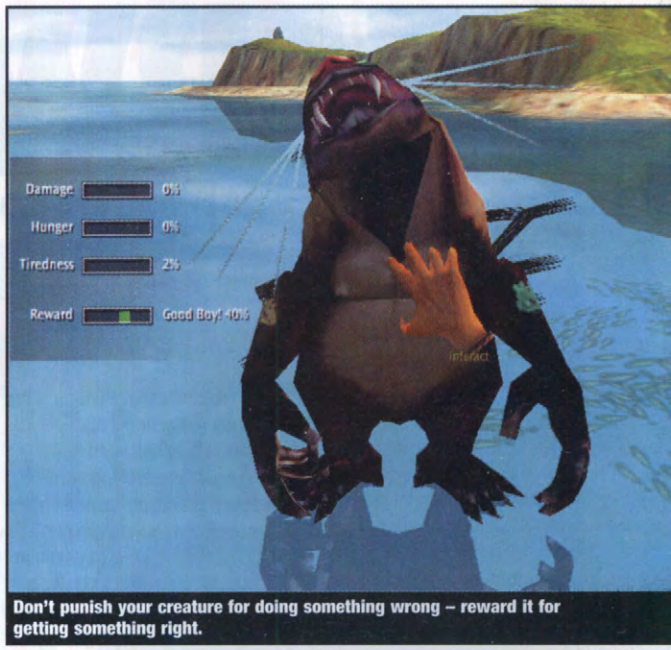
TEACHING AND LEARNING

There are basically three ways your creature can learn. The first method is to methodically show your creature what to do. Attach the leash of learning and perform the task you want it to learn. If it understands what you're doing it will point and look pleased. If you're teaching it to cast a miracle a light appears over its head with a percentage figure that shows how close it is to perfecting that miracle.

Never reward your creature until it actually performs the task you are teaching it though.

Another method is to let your creature find things out for itself. Unfortunately this method can be a bit dangerous, as creatures often pick up bad habits while you're not watching. It's also worth mentioning that when stroking or slapping your creature you have to be extremely precise. If you are too slow your slap/stroke could relate to a completely different action that happened moments before.

The final technique comes from watching other gods and creatures. If creatures become friends and hang out together they learn from each other, so only let your creature befriend similarly aligned beings. PM

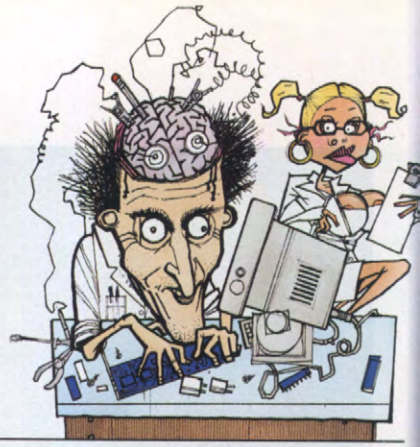


Don't punish your creature for doing something wrong – reward it for getting something right.


Don't let your creature hang out with the wrong crowd.


One's good, one's bad – put them in a soup and no one can tell the difference.

DEAR WANDY



In tests, eight out of ten PC owners who expressed an opinion say their computers prefer Wandy

VERY CLEVER Phil Wand

GOT A QUERY, DEARIE?

Send us a query or a top tip and you could pocket £50.

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us, and we, in turn, may well share it with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in-type-thing. And as an extra incentive, we're offering a cool £50 to the reader who sends in the most interesting query or toppest tip every month. No, really. Send as much relevant information as you can.

WRITE TO Dear Wandy, *PC ZONE*, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1P 5FF

EMAIL Address your letters to us at letters.pczone@dennis.co.uk **with the subject heading Dear Wandy.**

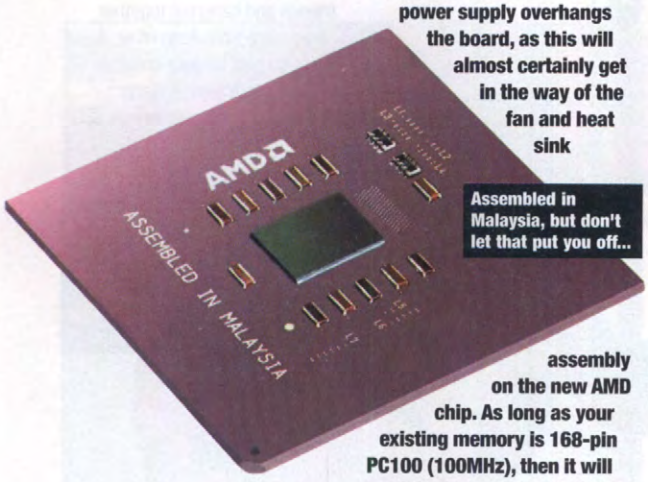
Please note: while we can assure you that we read every techie query sent to us, we are unable to offer personal replies. Also, please do not phone. Thanks.

CARRY ON DOCTOR

Q I'm thinking about upgrading my two year old 366MHz PC, as it is rapidly being left behind by the games developers. The problem is that, unlike most of the people whose letters you print, I have absolutely no idea what I'm doing. All I know is that I have a 366MHz AMD K6-2 3D processor, 64Mb SDRAM and a 'high performance' advanced mATX motherboard. This information is from the TIME catalogue I had the foresight to keep. I've caught on to the general idea that upgrading the processor depends on the nature of the motherboard, but I suspect that 'advanced mATX motherboard' is of little use as information on its own. The really stupid question is this: if I buy an AMD Abit KT7 motherboard and a Duron 800MHz processor, is it an easy task to install them into my PC? The even more stupid question is: will this then make my PC faster, or is there some other mysterious parameter that might prevent an 800MHz processor from running at 800MHz?

Dr Steve Jones

A Assuming the case is ATX style – which it most probably is – then the KT7 will fit the mountings. Drop it in, screw it down (lightly), hey presto. The only problem you might have is if the case is a short mini tower where the power supply overhangs the board, as this will almost certainly get in the way of the fan and heat sink assembly on the new AMD chip. As long as your existing memory is 168-pin PC100 (100MHz), then it will work in the new board. If not, you might need to go shopping for some new chips. Take my word for it, this will transform your machine beyond all recognition. You may have to go into the BIOS configuration screen and tell the board it has a lovely new Duron inside it, but apart from that, it should be pretty simple. No, really!



Assembled in Malaysia, but don't let that put you off...

DEAR SANTA

Q Personally, I hate upgrading my system as it normally involves a change of motherboard, CPU and so on. This time however, I want to buy a dual Pentium III system so when I want to upgrade, all I do is increase the memory and add an extra chip. I've searched all over the Net, but I can't find one that meets my needs. The following is what I need from the motherboard: Dual Slot1 (with support for 1GHz Pentium III), four DIMM slots for 1Gb RAM, 4x AGP, five PCI and a single ISA. UDMA/33, ATX architecture, PS/2 keyboard and mouse, two or more USB ports, plus UART. I found a motherboard close to these specs – the Supermicro P6DGE – but it's missing one vital feature, namely the AGP slot is 2x and not 4x. I'd be grateful if you could tell me where I can find myself such a motherboard!

tMf

A Wowser. That's what I call a wish-list. For a while, I thought you were asking for the impossible, as Slot 1 and ISA are effectively old technology, while 4x AGP is new and dual CPUs is just being unnecessarily flash. But fret ye not, as I have just found one. And it supports UDMA 66 rather than the 33 you specify, and up to 2Gb of PC100 SDRAM. Cool, huh? It's called a Tyan Tiger 133 (S1834D-1), and the full spec can be found at www.tyan.com/products/html/a_tiger133.html. **There's also a 'where to buy' link that lists all distributors. Now. If you don't currently own a slot based Pentium, I'd recommend getting yourself tooled up with a twin PGA370 board. Why? Because that way you can use the current PIII chip, as I wouldn't bank on the availability of another slot PIII when you come to upgrade.**

RIP VAN DIGITAL

Q Is there a way to allow the length of a Sound Recorder file to be extended enough to accommodate a whole CD track? I want to make backup copies of my favourites on my hard-drive, so I don't have to mess about with the discs. Is there a way to extend these files, or another program that is available to do this task?

Jacko

A Microsoft's Sound Recorder is a token offering thrown in with Windows to show you that it can record audio – it has an extremely limited feature set. To record anything of any length, you'll need to track down a 'proper' package. Having said all that, you'll still be recording the analog output of your CD player, and will thus be losing some serious quality, not to mention it taking a full four minutes to record a four minute track. What you need is some ripping software, which will read the digital values direct from the CD and then encode them into whatever you want to use – probably a compressed format such as MP3. Digital is of a much higher quality, and has the added bonus of being able to 'rip' many times faster than normal play speed. Point your browser at mp3.box.sk **and look under CD Grabbers for a review of available shareware and freeware.**

THE HEAT IS ON

Q I recently decided to take a plunge into my bank account and build my own Athlon based PC. I was on a limited budget, but felt that what I ended up with was rather good – until now. At first, I could not afford a monitor, so bought a 3D card with a TV out. All was well, until I twigged that neither OpenGL nor Direct3D could be displayed, so I picked up a 15in Tulip monitor. The main problem is that my computer likes rebooting when I'm doing anything – random crashes where the whole system either freezes or reboots. Do you have any suggestions as to why these random crashes happen?

Bob Anderson



Quad fans means the heat is off.

A I confess I've been unable to find your motherboard listed on the Biostar site, but as all the other M7VK series boards are Socket A, I think it's safe to assume you have a socket style Athlon. In which case, check and double-check the CPU heat sink and fan unit: believe it or not, random crashes are almost always down to heat build-up on AMD machines. As you constructed the machine yourself, did you put any silicon compound between the heat sink and the processor itself? Are the heat sink and fan beefy enough, or are they cheap-cheap? Remember that an Athlon will produce a lot more heat than its Intel equivalent. Standard heat compound can be purchased from www.maplin.co.uk, **while more extreme measures such as Artic Silver and a family size cooling unit can be obtained from specialist sites such as** www.overclock.co.uk, www.overclockingstore.co.uk **or** www.overclockersdirect.co.uk.

"The main problem is that my computer likes rebooting when I'm doing anything"

BOB ANDERSON, HAVING TROUBLE EVERY TIME HE TOUCHES NEAR HIS PC

HEAP BIG TROUBLE

Q Your magazine (*It's not Wandy's, he just thinks it is – Ed.*) has been recommending the ABIT KT7A motherboard for a few months now, and while it is arguably the best one on the market, I thought you might want to warn your readers about some known problems with it. I've ordered two in the last two months, one for work and one for home, and have had persistent problems with both of them – most of which have come from the general incompatibilities with legacy sound card devices, especially with Sound Blaster Live! and Diamond Monster MX300s, but there are also many problems with USB peripheral device compatibility, OS incompatibilities, memory instability and so on. The list of common problems is huge, so if anyone's having difficulty then most answers can be found at **www.viahardware.com/faq/kt7/kt7faq.htm**. My home PC is relatively stable and the motherboard seems to be a different version of the KT7A RAID, which has plastic guides on the memory slots. My work PC does not have the guides and has a darker shade of purple parallel port and is constantly showing the 'Blue Screen Of Death' despite being an identical set-up.

Rob Turner

A **You are correct: there are some known 'issues' with the motherboard and cards such as the Sound Blaster Live!, but there are also known cures. The problem affects all KT133/KT133A based motherboards (Abit, Asus, Iwill, etc), so that's a big chunk of all Socket A motherboards in existence. To solve it, simply download the latest BIOS for your board and install the latest via4in1 drivers for the chipset (currently version 4.31). As for OS incompatibilities, we have no fewer than three machines here running Abit KT7, Abit KT7A and a super-spanky new Iwill KK266-R: all are VIA KT133 or KT133A boards, and all have different versions of Sound Blaster Live! cards – yes, I know, we do ask for it somewhat – together with a variety of different Microsoft operating systems. All have absolutely no problems, even taking into account my tortuous overclocking experiments. The only compatibility problems I have seen so far have been caused by slack manufacturers being slow with drivers for the newer versions of Windows (ie ME 2000). I don't know if you have your system overclocked, but you might want to check your memory settings and set the speed to CPU, or increase the drive strength to 3. Nanu nanu!**

NO STRESS COMPUTING

Q I bought a new 500MHz CPU for my 333MHz PC. I know it's crummy, but my computer is old. After I installed the processor, I started up my computer but in the startup screen it still shows 333 this I thought was just a slight glitch so I carried on, now this is where it gets complicated: I bought this processor so I could play my latest game *Black & White,* before it had been quite glitchy and all the textures were totally messed, but afterwards it was just as bad. After a bit of web surfing I found that I needed to upgrade my 3dfx card (Voodoo 3) driver, this worked on the first land but when I got to the next land it started to get very jumpy and got stuck probably because of the extra gods and creatures etc, I don't know how to fix this and I don't have much cash, so a cheap solution would be nice just a suggestion of how to make my computer recognise the new processor would be good.

Jamie

A **I suspect you currently possess one of the world's most relaxed 500Mhz CPUs. Although you've changed the chip, my guess is that the motherboard doesn't know you've done so, and thus remains running at 333MHz. Depending on your motherboard, you'll need to set the speed: essentially, you must tell the machine to run at 100Mhz front side bus (FSB) and at five times multiplier. Unless it's a Celeron, in which case you want 66Mhz FSB and 7.5 multiplier. This can be done by jumpered links on the motherboard or through settings in the BIOS. If the BIOS doesn't offer enough multiplier options, check the manufacturer's website for an update.** PCZ

CPU Internal Core Speed	: Manual
CPU Core:Bus Freq. Multiple	: 4.5x
CPU Bus Frequency	: 100MHz
Boot Virus Detection	: Enabled
CPU Level 1 Cache	: Enabled
CPU Level 2 Cache	: Enabled
CPU Level 2 Cache ECC Check	: Disabled
BIOS Update	: Enabled
Turbo Mode	: Disabled
Quick Power On Self Test	: Enabled
HDD Sequence SCSI/IDE First	: SCSI
Boot Sequence	: A,C
Boot Up Floppy Seek	: Disabled

BIOS allows you to set the clock and multiplier.

PCZONE

COMING NEXT ISSUE

WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW AND DEMO

PROJECT EDEN

PLUS...

EXCLUSIVE DEMOS

Aliens Vs Predator 2
Throne Of Darkness
Max Payne
Star Trek: Deep Space Nine – Dominion Wars

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

Anarchy Online
Max Payne
MechCommander 2

ON SALE THURSDAY AUGUST 23

WATCHDOG



The software industry can be a closed shop when it comes to punters and their complaints. Let *PC ZONE* ramraid their premises for you and snatch some answers...

MAN OF THE PEOPLE Adam Phillips

LIVING IN A WORLD O' HURT?

We're here to help. If you have a consumer issue that needs addressing then drop us a line.

WRITE TO Watchdog, *PC ZONE*, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1P 5FF

EMAIL Alternatively, email us at letters.pczone@dennis.co.uk **with the subject heading Watchdog**

SLAMMED UP!

Complaint #1

Q I was wondering if you could help me with a problem I'm having with online games retailer www.theslammer.com.

On April 6, I placed an order for *Black & White* at £24.99. The order went through fine and I received a confirmation e-mail stating: "Most orders are received next working day. However, please allow up to four days for games to get to you." I thought that was fine. But it's now May 1. In between that time, I've sent e-mails to theslammer.com (only one automated reply); filled in the order tracker on the website (no reply); and called both of the help lines listed on the website (no one even answers). Then, to top all that off, when my bank statement arrived this morning, I saw that on April 12, theslammer.com had debited my Switch card twice – a total of £49.98.

I have been using theslammer.com for a while because it has good prices, a loyalty points system (I lost all of mine when its servers were upgraded) and it has even given away free games (although these hardly ever arrive). I've never had a delivery from them within four days but I thought I'd stick with them as they seemed to be a young company and I thought I'd do my bit to support them.

Now though, I've had enough. This total lack of customer service seems ridiculous. It's impossible to get in contact with

DODGY DEALINGS?

Dixons does it again

Q I am fed up with Dixons. Time and time again I have been annoyed by its poor customer service. I have to admit it hasn't lost me any money or anything like that – it has just been damn annoying. Dixons seems to have given the pricing-gun to some kind of maniac and told him to run around the shop with it.

For example, I tried to buy *M1 Tank Platoon 2* a few months back – £29.99 the label said so I went home and saved up for a few weeks before returning with the money only to be told the actual price was £12.99. A few weeks later, I thought I'd get *Alpha Centuri*. The price tag said £19.99, so I took it to the counter and low and behold, it was priced at £29.99. Now, is it just me, or isn't it actually illegal for the price tag to say one thing and then to charge a higher price at the counter? Many of my friends have also had similar problems with Dixons so I'm not alone here.

My second problem with them is their customer care and the general lack of knowledge of their employees. When I bought the aforementioned *M1 Tank Platoon 2*, it didn't come with a manual. I went back to the shop and told them this. I was then told to look in the readme files because there was no manual for *M1 Tank Platoon 2* – a hugely complex game in terms of controls. I looked in the readme files but there was nothing there. I went back but just got the same response: look in the readme files. In the end, I borrowed a friend's manual. A few weeks later, my friend was attempting to buy *Rainbow Six*. We couldn't find it on the shelves so he asked the shop assistant if they had it. He said: "Oh yes, it's the new one. It's called *Rogue Squadron*." He then attempted to sell my friend *Star Wars Rogue Squadron*.

Finally, I was in there again the other week when I overheard someone ask the shop assistant if it was possible to record MP3s onto mini discs. "Oh yes," the shop assistant replied confidently. "You just need to buy one of these boxes. They cost £50." Now surely anyone who sells computers should know that all you need to record MP3s onto any other device is a cable to connect your sound card to whatever device you're using. It's a cable that costs around £12.99 in Dixons or £3.99 at Maplin.

Maybe all these problems are minor, but it still annoys me that people are having to fork out more cash than is necessary.

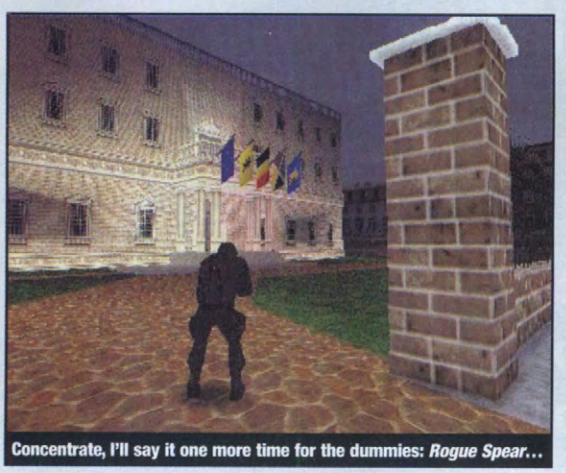
Jo Henderson

A God bless Dixons staff. We've got our own stories of mirth when dealing with its employees, we won't go into that here but merely ask Dixons for its take on your many complaints: "We are sorry to hear about Jo Henderson's concerns and are investigating the points raised," offers Hamish Thompson, head of Press and PR at Dixons. "We have checked our records of the products highlighted and can find no evidence of the variations in prices as highlighted in Jo's letter. However, we have written to Jo to gather additional information in order to finalise our enquiries."

He also says that Dixons is sorry to hear that a manual was not supplied with one of the games you purchased and wish to reassure you and other customers that "this is not standard practice. We are sourcing a manual for the game and will forward it to Jo on receipt."

Dixons conclude by saying: "As far as advice on products is concerned, all Dixons store staff receive regular, detailed briefings on new product launches. Our staff pride themselves on their knowledge of technology and we wish to reassure our customers, Jo included, that the standard of advice provided is of the highest priority for all staff."

Fair enough it would seem – perhaps your experiences are a one-off, Jo... In the meantime, if any readers out there have tales of staff incompetency at any major PC or games high street retailer, please send them in. We will be printing the best ones...



Concentrate, I'll say it one more time for the dummies: *Rogue Spear*...



...*Rogue Squadron*, got it?



GAUNTLET - EUROPEAN WARS

DIXONS PRICE **£29.99**

From the Dixons website *Cossacks: European Wars* is confusingly titled as *Gauntlet — European Wars*. Clear as mud.



theslammer.com website seems fine. But what's really going on? We would love to know.

theslammer.com. They took double the money from my account and I didn't even receive my game. It seems like theft to me. I hope you can get a little sense from them or just steer other readers away from such a useless service.

Daniel Brandon

Complaint #2

Q I am writing to you in the hope that you can come to my rescue after receiving some poor customer service from theslammer.com. I was sent an e-mail as an advert from theslammer.com on February 23, advertising a PlayStation 2 for £150. "What an offer," I thought. The children had been saving their money and could afford the price. Then I read the small print: "Pay full price and get £150 cashback. Only available for this weekend." So, after discussingit with my wife and the kids, we took the plunge and ordered online.

On the Monday, I phoned up to check that the offer was all that it seemed and was told I would have a cheque back two or three days after I had filled in a questionnaire – this was the only stipulation to the offer. After many phone calls enquiring where the PS2 was, it finally arrived after the carrier company had lost it – it was March 15. My credit card was debited on February 28, despite the website saying that cards are not debited until despatch. I then had to fill in a form on the website and send a questionnaire back via snail mail. This was all done on the day the PS2 arrived.

I phoned on March 28 to see where my cheque was and I was told that it could take three to seven weeks to arrive, not the two to three days, as I was previously told. When I told them this, I was told that they couldn't go with what I was told previously – I would have to like it or lump it. I wrote an e-mail explaining that I was unhappy with the situation and the response was: "Send it back for a refund."

If I can't get a cheque out of them now, how am I going to get a refund? I have tried phoning but can't get through. I have sent another e-mail but there is no response. Please can you help me get my money from these people as I want to pay off my credit card without accruing even more interest.

Quillon Fox

A So, what on earth is going on at theslammer.com? Watchdog e-mailed them on staff@theslammer.com, and received the following automated response: "Thank you for writing to us, we apologise that due to staff shortage we will be unable to reply to your mail in a short time. We will try our utmost best to reply to you as soon as possible, we apologise for the inconvenience."

Hmm, that doesn't sound good. We sent a follow-up e-mail a few days later but alas, we have still to hear anything back from them. We also tried contacting them on the number included in their automated e-mail, but it was engaged whenever we tried it.

Subsequently, we have decided to print your complaints in the hope that theslammer.com can be bothered to offer an official explanation after seeing your grievances in black and white. We'll keep you informed of any progress...

READ ME

If you are writing in to complain about a product, please supply us with your full name, address and contact number. With PCs, make sure that you also include all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers. It means that we can resolve your problems much quicker.

MAD AT MICROSOFT

Q Subject: Microsoft and Extortion. Hardly a surprise there. I recently purchased a new computer from Evesham and connected it all up. I turned it from my new PC as my modem is not supported. I phoned Microsoft and they told me I can order it from them at the extortionate rate of £16.82 to handle shipping. Why should a company be able to do this for a product that can be downloaded off the Internet free of charge?

Simon Paulton

A Microsoft's answer is brief and to the point: "Microsoft's position is that Service Packs ordered over the telephone are generally chargeable items," says a spokesperson in its PR office. "The cost levied is only for administration, postage, packaging and shipping. All Microsoft service packs or updates are available to download from the Microsoft website free of charge."

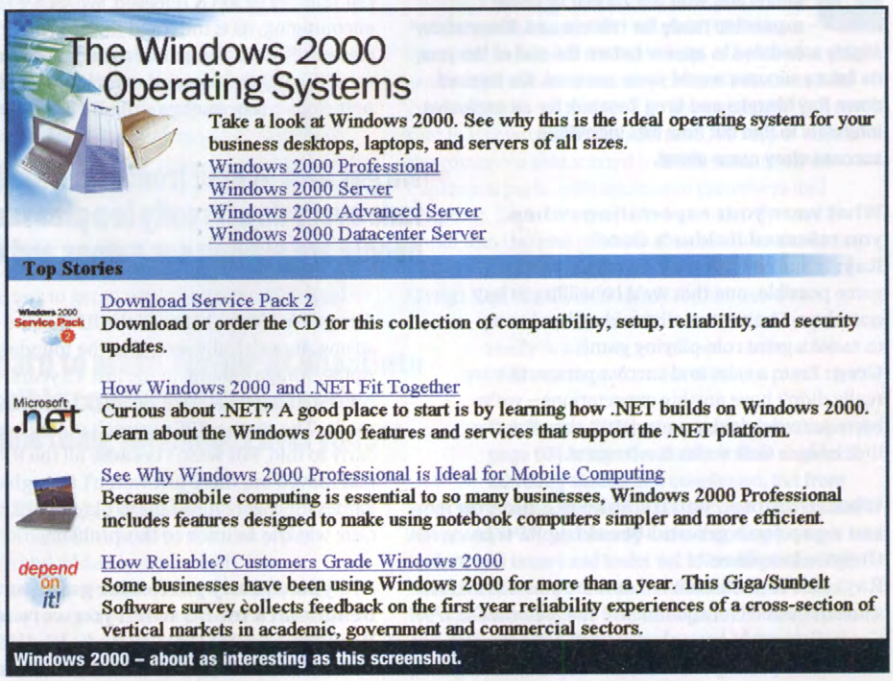
That old "administration" charge, eh... needless to say, this is fairly standard practice across the industry as far as Watchdog can ascertain. In the meantime, perhaps instead of installing Win2K when WinME crashed, you should have dropped Evesham a line to see why your OS wasn't operating in the first place. PCZ

"I phoned Microsoft and they told me I can order it from them at the extortionate rate of £16.82 to handle shipping"

SIMON PAULTON, NOT IMPRESSED BY 'ADMINISTRATION' CHARGES

it on and WinME crashed on me before I even logged on. So I took the decision to upgrade to Win2K which has worked brilliantly. There was no cost in this as I already have a machine running Win2K.

After finding a few games wouldn't work, I checked the differences between the computers and found that the one I had already had Service Pack One installed. I can't download



Windows 2000 – about as interesting as this screenshot.



TALKING HEADS

Ray Muzyka and Greg Zeschuk, joint CEOs of BioWare, reveal everything you wanted to know about *Baldur's Gate* but were too afraid to ask

CHIEF INQUISITOR Chris Anderson

BioWare Corp has become synonymous with quality RPGs. The success of *Baldur's Gate* has put them at the forefront of the RPG genre, and with the *Throne Of Bhaal* expansion ready for release and *Neverwinter Nights* scheduled to appear before the end of the year, its future success would seem assured. We tracked down Ray Muzyka and Greg Zeschuk for an exclusive interview to find out how this incredible success story came about.

What were your expectations when you released *Baldur's Gate*?
Ray: I think we just tried to make the best game possible, one that we'd be willing to buy ourselves. The team really worked hard to try to make a great role-playing game.
Greg: From a sales and success perspective we really didn't have any big expectations – we've been quite shocked to see what a phenomenon the *Baldur's Gate* series has become.

What prompted you to make *BG*, did you see a gap for a ground-breaking RPG in the marketplace?
Ray: I think we did think that there was a need for some more RPGs at the time we released *Baldur's Gate* – Greg and I have always been huge fans of RPGs and there hadn't been a lot of really strong ones in the period immediately prior to when we released *BG* (one exception to this that I can recall was *Fallout*). Since *BG*, of course there have been a fair number of RPGs released, which we find encouraging, as is the trend towards mixing RPG elements into other genres such as action, RTS, FPS, etc. With BG we just tried to include a lot of the best elements of our favourite RPGs of the past...

"We get a lot of mail from satisfied *Baldur's Gate* fans every day, it really is a pleasure to know people are playing our games and enjoying them"

Greg: We always believed the RPG genre was strong. It practically served as the foundation for Apple/Amiga gaming in the last 15 years – this was central in our belief that *Baldur's Gate* needed to be made. The reason RPGs weren't selling well in the early to mid '90s wasn't because all the RPG players had moved on; there just weren't enough appealing games for classic RPG fans to play. For us, *Baldur's Gate* was the solution to this problem.

Did you use any particular game as a benchmark for *BG* when you were making it?
Ray: Yes, actually. We've played a lot of RPGs here at BioWare, both PC and console, and we tried to include a lot of the elements of our favourites from the past in *BG*. The chapter-based methodology in *BG* came from the way the chapters worked in *Betrayal At Krondor*, the icon system (spells, weapons etc) came out of the spell icons in *Dark Sun*, the pause and play came from an analysis of *Darklands*, and we also included elements from a lot of other great RPGs such as the *Ultima/Ultima Underworld* series, *System Shock*, *Wizardry*, *Might & Magic*, *Final Fantasy*, *Fallout* and its spiritual successor *Wasteland*, the gold box series (such as *Pool Of Radiance* and *Curse Of The Azure Bonds*), and many others.
Greg: We're unabashed about drawing inspiration from great games of the past.

Were you surprised at the game's success?
Ray: A little. But I guess we just tried to make the best game possible – each game we make at BioWare has to be better than the last one. It's always very cool to know that your fans are enjoying playing the games you've worked hard on.
Greg: We measure a game's success partially via sales, awards and reviews, but another significant part of our perception of being successful is from the direct fan response. We get a lot of mail from satisfied *Baldur's Gate* fans every day, it really is a pleasure to know people are playing our games and enjoying them.


Baldur's Gate II improved on the original in almost every way.


Did you hear the one about the druid, the thief and the warrior?



Baldur's Gate: where it all began.


Throne Of Bhaal – more than just an expansion? Find out on page 68.

What are your feelings on *BGII*, do you feel it's a worthy successor to the original game? Is there anything you would change if you made it again?

Ray: Definitely. We're proud of the way in which the team improved on *Baldur's Gate* in *Baldur's Gate II*. We started with a list of recommendations from our fans, and actually managed to implement nearly everything we set out to implement. We improved things such as the journal (allowing sorting and different sections for done quests and not-yet-completed quests), the map page (allowing for map notes), improvements to the pathfinding system and enemy scripting and AI, as well as many new monsters, spells and areas. *BGII* is considerably larger than its predecessor in terms of the number and complexity of quests, and provides more than 200 hours of gameplay if you were to do absolutely everything (or about 50-75 if you did just the basic run through). In the end we managed to complete *BGII* in a timely fashion (it was scheduled to be released Sept 15 2000 and it was released on Sept 21) and with almost all of the features we had started out with.

Greg: There was a lot of pressure on us while making *Baldur's Gate II* – we challenged ourselves to make the sequel better than the original in every way. We certainly didn't want to be seen as suffering from the sophomore jinx (this might be an exclusively North American term for saying that we can't follow up on a good original game). The team was very focused on making *Baldur's Gate II* the best game BioWare has ever made.

Is there anything revolutionary about *Throne Of Bhaal*? What does it bring to *BG* fans that they haven't seen before?

Ray: *Throne Of Bhaal* is a very large and very high quality expansion pack that brings the storyline of the Children Of Bhaal to a resounding conclusion. It also includes a large dungeon area – Watcher's Keep – that is the best dungeon of any of the *Baldur's Gate* series. We're also increasing the experience point cap to allow characters to get to something like 40th level – very powerful indeed (the average player will probably approach 30th level by the end of the expansion) – and added in some really fun encounters for high-level players. New high-level spells (9th level mage spells) have been added in, as have high level abilities for all classes (things like greater whirlwind and smite attack for fighters, exploding traps for thieves, blade barrier for clerics and some cool summoning effects for mages). There's a new mage subclass – the Wild Mage – that is pretty interesting (magic is somewhat unpredictable and fun using this class), and a new NPC character – Sarevok from *Baldur's Gate* – who can join your party in the expansion, as can any of the NPCs from *BGII* (you access them in a new abyssal stronghold area that is accessible in the expansion). To top it off, all the romances that started in *BGII* continue in the expansion pack, with additional voiceovers and scripting. So, we've tried hard to make *Throne Of Bhaal* into the best possible conclusion to the series, putting in something for almost everyone.

Greg: Can't really add much to that except to reiterate that the *Throne Of Bhaal* expansion really is a fitting conclusion to the child of Bhaal saga. It's a lot of fun to play.

"We've tried hard to make *Throne Of Bhaal* into the best possible conclusion to the series, putting in something for almost everyone"

The *Throne Of Bhaal* expansion (see review on page 63) brings the *Baldur's Gate* saga as it currently stands to a conclusion, but from what we've seen, the best is yet to come from BioWare. *Neverwinter Nights* already looks dazzling (see our lead feature last issue) and looks set to continue the high standard BioWare set with the *Baldur's Gate* series. We'll be following this title throughout its development and delivering the first review on one of the biggest games of 2002 when it appears early next year.

PCZONE TOP100

Welcome to the definitive buyer's guide for all discerning PC gamers. The games that grace these pages represent the best titles across all genres. Check here for regular updates

Have you got money burning a hole in your pocket? If so, make a cheque or postal order payable to *PC ZONE* and we'll forget about writing the mag and get ourselves down the pub for a good drink-up. If you're not feeling altruistic then perhaps you might want to buy yourself a game, but which one? How can you sort the *Unreal Tournament* from the *Daikatana*? Relax, this is where the *PC ZONE* Top 100 comes in handy.

Every single game listed here is worth buying. If you're a fan of a certain genre you can head straight for your favourite games, which are ranked in order of brilliance. Some of the games might be a bit long in the tooth but that shouldn't put you off. Most of the old-timers have been re-released on budget and you'll be able to find the rest pretty cheap if you shop around.

The rules are pretty simple. Each month we review a load of games. If any of them are good enough to enter the Top 100 they take their rightful place and the bottom one in that particular genre is consigned to the dustbin never to return again. As games are always improving, we re-evaluate all the titles in a genre every time there's a new entry.

Each month we'll also show you which games we think are the Top 10 of all time. This month Rhianna Pratchett gets the chance to talk about all the games she's banned from mentioning in the office.



WHEN WE SAY CLASSIC, WE MEAN IT

Under the *ZONE* scoring system, new games will have to be pretty spectacular to receive this award. They will have to take their genre to unprecedented new heights and represent a major step forward for PC gaming. There are only a few titles that can justifiably be described as *PC ZONE* Classics. This trend will continue across all genres. Generally speaking, all *ZONE* Classics are must-have titles – the benchmark title being the definitive game of the genre – but that does not mean you should discount games that score 80+ per cent. These games receive the *PC ZONE* Award For Excellence and are essential buys if you are a fan of the genre the game fits into. Classics, on the other hand, are games we think will appeal to everyone and will bring new fans to that particular genre. There will not be many of them (which is the point, of course), but when we say a game is a Classic, we mean it.



FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS

HALF-LIFE

BENCHMARK GAME



PCZ #71 • 95%

Taking the first-person shooter as its starting point, *Half-Life* redefines the genre with an engrossing story, cracking atmosphere and some of the best AI ever coded. *Half-Life* is probably still the best game you can install on your PC, and it's now available with the superb *Opposing Force* add-on in the *Generations* pack.

PUBLISHER Vivendi • 01189 209100

BUDGET



UNREAL TOURNAMENT — PCZ #81 • 90%

Played over a network or the Internet, *Unreal Tournament* is more than a match for *Quake III*'s multiplayer, with a combination of well-designed maps and diverse gameplay. The single-player mode might be too short, but it's still going to be more than a challenge for most.

PUBLISHER Infogrames • 020 7738 8188



QUAKE III ARENA — PCZ #87 • 89%

The biggest brand name in PC gaming is back. The sheer speed, intensity and unrelenting action of *Quake III* make it an essential purchase for all shoot 'em up fans, but sadly the lack of variety prevents it from topping *Unreal Tournament*.

PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525



CLIVE BARKER'S UNDYING — PCZ #101 • 85%

This atmospheric game is one of the most unsettling FPSs we've seen. The graphics and superb sound will have you leaping out of your seat. Here's hoping Barker's contribution will help push the future of narrative and gameplay forward.

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134



GUNMAN CHRONICLES — PCZ #97 • 84%

While comparisons to *Half-Life* are inevitable, *Gunman* contains more than enough nuances to stand out on its own merits. With a superb array of weapons, intense battles and a gripping atmosphere it's a must-have for any fan of the genre.

PUBLISHER Vivendi • 01189 209100



PROJECT IGI — PCZ #97 • 84%

Combining the action of *Soldier Of Fortune* with the stealth of *Metal Gear Solid*, *Project IGI* is the thinking man's FPS. It features vast, open landscapes, and its clever changes of pace and espionage-oriented storyline will keep you engrossed throughout.

PUBLISHER Eidos • 020 8636 3000



STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE — PCZ #94 • 84%

The first single-player game to use the *Quake III* engine, *Voyager* offers enough thrills to please even the hardest of Trekkie haters. A new scripting system and some clever CPU team-mates give renewed credence to solo play in this increasingly multiplayer genre.

PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143 525



SERIOUS SAM — PCZ #102 • 81%

Serious Sam is a game that's seriously good fun. You get more monsters than you could ever wish for – they come out of the walls, the floor, pretty much everywhere. A good old-fashioned, arcade-style shooter, with a liberal dose of humour.

PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive • 01753 722900



MECHWARRIOR 4: VENGEANCE — PCZ #99 • 80%

This fourth offering in the popular combat series is a feast of superb graphics, challenging missions and er… realistic snow. The multiplayer option is great and features some excellent team-based modes, but like all big robot games, it's still only likely to sell in the US.

PUBLISHER Microsoft • 0845 5700 2000

BUDGET



THIEF II: THE METAL AGE — PCZ #88 • 80%

The original *Thief* set new standards in FPS titles with its move away from mindless action towards stealth and its excellent use of light and sound. This sequel delivers more of the same quality gameplay, minus the out-of-place zombie levels.

PUBLISHER Eidos • 020 8636 3000

STRATEGY

SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR

BENCHMARK GAME



PCZ #89 • 90%

Take command of enormous armies and engage in epic and bloody battles, send ninjas to assassinate generals and conquer your way through the map of feudal Japan. The 3D engine works beautifully and the in-game options don't get in the way of the instant playability of this game. *Shogun* will simply blow you away.

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134



Z: STEEL SOLDIERS — PCZ #101 • 90%

Z will re-ignite your passion for strategy games with its fast-paced in-yer-face action that allows you to get down and dirty from the off. The AI is superb, and as it's entirely mouse-driven, it's simple and easy to get into. What more could you ask for?

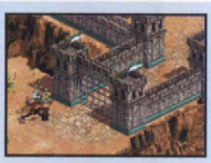
PUBLISHER EON • 0700 4366344



COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS — PCZ #101 • 89%

There are 8,000 troops at your disposal in this historically accurate RTS. Smooth unit movement and a 3D landscape with real physics modelling make it truly absorbing. With great graphics and sound effects to boot it's an essential purchase.

PUBLISHER CDV • 020 8880 4144



AOE: COLLECTORS' EDITION — PCZ #84 • 88%

It might not be radically different from the original, but sometimes evolution is just as good as revolution. In *AOEII*, the gameplay is honed to perfection with balanced units and strong single- and multiplayer campaigns. Forget the hype of *Tiberian Sun* and try this classic RTS.

PUBLISHER Microsoft • 0845 5700 2000



GROUND CONTROL — PCZ #92 • 86%

RTSs are increasingly dropping resource management in order to concentrate on strategy. *Ground Control* pulls this off with flair, gorgeous looks and a brilliant camera. If you're after a 3D strategy title but don't fancy samurais, this is the answer.

PUBLISHER Vivendi • 01189 209100



SUDDEN STRIKE PCZ #96 • 85%

Sudden Strike mixes WWII action with a heavy dose of realism in order to create a compelling RTS. Its clever resource management, huge selection of units and separate campaigns make it a must for RTS fans looking for something a bit different.

PUBLISHER CDV • 020 8880 4144



HOMEWORLD: CATACLYSM — PCZ #96 • 85%

Relic's mission to improve the already superb 3D RTS *Homeworld* has proved to be a great success. The *Homeworld* universe has been expanded, providing a more elaborate storyline and greater scope for tactical options than its predecessor.

PUBLISHER Vivendi • 01189 209100



EARTH 2150 — PCZ #90 • 84%

A fantastic 3D engine and great detail team up with sheer playability to make this one of the best RTS games around. *Earth 2150* is a more traditional strategy title than the likes of *Shogun*, and it has the rare quality of actually advancing the genre.

PUBLISHER Ubi Soft • 020 8944 9000



C&C: RED ALERT 2 — PCZ #95 • 82%

After the disappointment of *Tiberian Sun* we weren't expecting much from this sequel, but we were pleasantly surprised. *RA2* manages to mix a believable storyline with enhanced gameplay and extremely versatile units. An entertaining sequel.

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134



IMPERIUM GALACTICA II — PCZ #85 • 79%

Space expansion and empire building have never looked so good. This title boasts the depth of a turn-based strategy game with the immediate action of real time, plus a great interface and tutorial, which means you'll know your way round in no time.

PUBLISHER Infogrames • 020 7738 8188

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

DEUS EX

BENCHMARK GAME



PCZ #93 • 94%

Warren Spector takes the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief* and weaves an RPG of complex beauty that revolutionises computer games. A fascinating sci-fi plot and complete player freedom are just some of the reasons why *Deus Ex* is such a landmark wonder.

PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive • 020 8636 3000



SYSTEM SHOCK 2 — PCZ #80 • 91%

Definitely one of the most compelling, original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it in the house on your own with the lights off to prove how hard you are.

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134



VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE REDEMPTION — PCZ #92 • 89%

This amazing RPG is a treat to play. An epic storyline, tactical combat and great acting and music more than make up for the fact that it's a linear hack 'n' slash game at heart.

PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT — PCZ #87 • 87%

An incredible game from Black Isle, creators of *Baldur's Gate*. It's a dark, adult scorcher of an RPG. Moreover, the character development is the best we've seen in any game of its kind and the story is compelling, with well-scripted dialogue.

PUBLISHER Interplay • 020 7551 4266



BALDUR'S GATE II — PCZ#96 • 85%

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. Although this sequel is not vastly different, it is bigger, better and extremely addictive. *Baldur's Gate II* is a must for all RPG fans.

PUBLISHER Interplay • 020 7551 4266



ANANCHRONOX — PCZ #105 • 83%

NEW ENTRY The release of *Anachronox* proves *Deus Ex* wasn't a fluke for Ion Storm. OK, it's not as good, but it's an interesting and genuinely funny game in its own right, and we don't get to say that about many games. Well worth a punt.

PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive • 020 8636 3000



FINAL FANTASY VII — PCZ #66 • 80%

Despite the release of *FFVIII*, we still rate this earlier episode in the series above it. The story is better, there are more sub-games and the whole thing is more involving, especially if you like Japanese-style cartoony graphics. And it's now on budget release.

PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive • 020 8636 3000



FALLOUT 2 — PCZ #71 • 79%

Twice as big as the original, but utilising the exact same engine. If you liked the first game, you'll love this – and if you don't already own the original, you can now pick up both of these life-sapping RPGs for less than a tenner.

PUBLISHER Interplay • 0207 551 4266



ICEWIND DALE — PCZ #93 • 75%

Despite the introduction of larger enemies, *Icewind Dale* is little more than an add-on pack for *Baldur's Gate*. It looks the same and it plays the same, which isn't surprising since it's made by the same people. Very good, but no competition to *Baldur's Gate II*.

PUBLISHER Interplay • 0207 5514266



DIABLO II — PCZ #93 • 72%

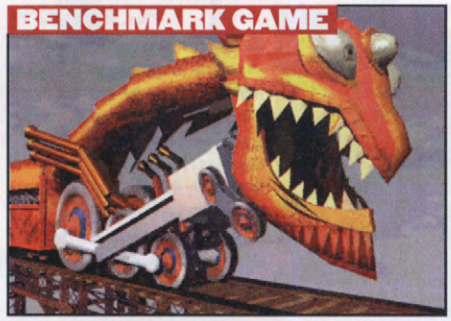
Blizzard might have repackaged the original *Diablo* and produced an even bigger version with the same graphics and gameplay, but its many fans aren't complaining. It's already one of the hottest and biggest-selling games ever.

PUBLISHER Vivendi • 01189 209100

ACTION/ADVENTURE

GRIM FANDANGO

BENCHMARK GAME



PCZ #71 • 88%

If you've followed the successes of LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must-buy. Sublime graphics and genuine humour ensure it's a classic of its genre. A word of warning: it's bloody hard and, if your mind doesn't work laterally, you'll be playing it until the day you die.

PUBLISHER LucasArts • 020 7368 2255



DISCWORLD NOIR — PCZ #79 • 87%

Although the point-and-click adventure genre is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and is all the better for it in our opinion, particularly if you're not a fan of Terry Pratchett's zany, off-the-wall humour. Don't miss it.

PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 8278060



SEVERANCE: BLADE OF DARKNESS — PCZ #98 • 87%

Anyone who doesn't mind being splattered with the kind of gore rarely seen outside of *Soldier Of Fortune* will find much to like in *Severance*. But it stands out from the usual hack 'n' slasher with its amazing engine and console-style combos.

PUBLISHER Codemasters • 01926 814132



THE NOMAD SOUL — PCZ #83 • 86%

Distinctly odd, but original nonetheless, *The Nomad Soul* is a huge, intricate world populated by lap-dancers and David Bowie. At turns adventure, beat 'em up and platformer, it's insanely ambitious and almost manages to pull it off.

PUBLISHER Eidos • 020 8636 3000



HITMAN: CODENAME 47 — PCZ #98 • 85%

Bringing back memories of *Leon* and *Day Of The Jackal*, *Hitman* recreates the cool excitement of carrying out a contract. Snipe from rooftops, disguise yourself in your victims' uniforms and walk away from explosions with calm elegance.

PUBLISHER Eidos • 020 8636 3000



BLAIR WITCH VOL 1: RUSTIN PARR — PCZ #96 • 84%

As well as being a truly scary action/horror title, this is one of the finest action/adventure games we've played. The suspense is incredible, and a constant stream of jump-out-of-your-seat moments will leave you with a distinct lack of clean underwear.

PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive • 01753 722900



INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE — PCZ #84 • 83%

LucasArts moves away from the point-and-click genre and into *Tomb Raider* territory for its latest Indy game, with the adventure elements still in place. Not bad, but not for traditionalists.

PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525



ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND — PCZ #98 • 82%

One of the hardest skills to master when developing a game is the ability to make your audience genuinely laugh with you rather than at you and, undoubtedly, *Escape From Monkey Island* is one of the most genuinely funny games to come out in the last couple of years.

PUBLISHER Activision •08705 143525



DEEP SPACE NINE: THE FALLEN — PCZ #98 • 82%

It's not often that a game with little promise on paper surprises us so nicely. *DS9* is a third-person action/adventure that offers you the chance to control Sisko, Kira or Worf. Gameplay is different for each character, which provides longevity in spades.

PUBLISHER Infinite Loop/Koch • 01256 707767



METAL GEAR SOLID — PCZ #96 • 82%

Although it's been ported pretty much identically from the console version (with a few graphical improvements), *MGS*'s tense gameplay, well-designed levels and variety of challenging bosses makes it stand out from the majority of similar PC titles.

PUBLISHER Microsoft • 0845 7002000

RACING GAMES

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2.0

BENCHMARK GAME



PCZ #98 • 86%

✪ With all the rally games available it was always going to be interesting to see how *2.0* would fare. Unsurprisingly, it blows away the competition. The graphics are superb, the detail all-encompassing and the car handles beautifully. If you have been waiting patiently for the definitive rally game, this is definitely it.

PUBLISHER Codemasters • 01926 814132



MIDTOWN MADNESS 2

PCZ #96 • 84%

✪ Buckle up for some high-speed action, as you race around London and San Francisco in this sequel. You won't find a more entertaining arcade driving game. The original *MM* was a belter, but with more cars and races and improved controls, *MM2* is now the daddy.

PUBLISHER Microsoft • 0845 7002000



F1 CHAMPIONSHIP: SEASON 2000

PCZ #97 • 82%

✪ While lacking the detailed realism of *GP3*, EA's latest F1 offering provides more fun and adrenalin-pumping moments than any other PC F1 game. With its mixture of arcade action and realism it is both accurate and easy to pick up.

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134



LE MANS 24 HOURS

PCZ #87 • 81 %

✪ Although not quite as challenging as the race it's based on, *Le Mans 24 Hours* is a driving game for skilful players who know their brakes from their elbows. You can even get involved in a rewarding career mode, culminating in the famous race itself.

PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 8278060



GRAND PRIX 3

PCZ #94 • 80%

✪ This F1 title displays all the customary Crammond perfectionism. The detail is amazing, which makes it all the more puzzling as to why there is no teamwork. Don't expect much more than a 3D accelerated *GP2*, but if that's what you're after you'll love it.

PUBLISHER Infogrames•0161 8278060



INSANE

PCZ #97 • 78%

✪ Primarily an online racing game, *Insane* allows you and your friends to indulge in some off-road racing mayhem in a range of different vehicles. Its wide selection of races will have you in hysterics, but the novelty does wear off pretty quickly.

PUBLISHER Codemasters • 01926 814132



NEED FOR SPEED PORSCHE 2000

PCZ #90 • 78%

✪ Not as good as hooking up with your mates at the arcade, but still a damn good conversion of a damn fine game. Forget realism and concentrate on flinging your car around the track as fast as you can. Who needs depth when racing is this exciting?

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134



RALLY MASTERS

PCZ #89 • 77%

✪ Rally games tend to blend into one another quite seamlessly. After all, the cars look exactly the same and they go round the same tracks. *Rally Masters*, however, offers the all-important feel of a great driving game together with loads of options and some tasty graphics.

PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 8278060



TOCA 2

PCZ #76 • 76%

✪ Predictably, Codemasters has gone and done it again. More cars, more tracks and the same stunning attention to detail make *TOCA 2* an essential purchase for petrolheads. Graphically, it may not be a massive improvement, but gameplay-wise it definitely is.

PUBLISHER Codemasters • 01926 814132



RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

PCZ #84 • 75%

✪ Close, but no *McRae*. That was the verdict from the boy Hill on this racer. It looks fantastic and the on-screen Ordnance Survey map is a nice touch, but it's let down by some poor camera angles and unnecessarily solid obstacles. Ouch.

PUBLISHER Actualise • 01625 855015

GOD GAMES

BLACK & WHITE

BENCHMARK GAME



PCZ #100 • 95%

✪ One of our joint top games of all time, *Black & White* is worth the hype and more. Hundreds of challenges through wondrous landscapes, packed full of spectacular AI-enhanced creatures and some genuinely original ideas. Sell your friends and family if you have to, but get a copy of this game. Pure genius.

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134



CALL TO POWER II

PCZ #98 • 85%

✪ *Civilization II* is one of the best games of all time, but that doesn't mean it doesn't need updating. It might not have the official *Civ* endorsement, but *Call To Power II* still retains the spirit of the game, while polishing almost every aspect of the gameplay.

PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525



THE SIMS

PCZ #87 • 85%

✪ This offers a staggering amount of possibilities. Essentially, you create your own person, or family, and guide them through the ups and downs of life. It's the definitive docu-soap and makes for compelling gameplay.

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134



CAESAR III

PCZ #70 • 84%

✪ Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail Caesar!

PUBLISHER Vivendi • 0118 920 9100



SIMCITY 3000

PCZ #74 • 83%

✪ Ten years on, *SimCity* remains as addictive as it ever was. Little was broken, and little was fixed. With new buildings and an enhanced transport system, *SimCity 3000* is a must for old-timers and new addicts alike.

PUBLISHER Maxis/EA • 01932 450134



ZEUS: MASTER OF OLYMPUS

PCZ #97 • 83%

✪ From the creators of *Pharaoh* and *Caesar III* comes this intricate yet hugely playable micro-management god game. It is highly addictive, but suffers slightly from its lack of multiplayer options and a poor combat system.

PUBLISHER Vivendi • 01189 209100



ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON

PCZ #75 • 82%

✪ Pack out your own theme park with the most fiendish rides your imagination can conjure up. From rickety wooden dippers to Nemesis-style, white-knuckle gurners, *RollerCoaster Tycoon* is hugely addictive. Be warned.

PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 827 8060



DUNGEON KEEPER 2

PCZ #79 • 75%

✪ *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea. *DKII* takes the essence of the original game, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics, and doses the myriad of features with a wise hand. And it keeps us very happy indeed.

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134



POPULOUS: THE BEGINNING

PCZ #70 • 74%

✪ The original *Populous* was the game that put Bullfrog into orbit and made Peter Molyneux one of the biggest names in the industry. Even 'Peterless', the Bullfrog team proved they can do just as well without him.

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134



THEME HOSPITAL

PCZ #71 • 73%

✪ We were sceptical at first. How can a sim game involving building hospitals be fun? But it is fun, damn fun. Building bigger and better hospitals and finding a cure for all our ills, including hairyitus, bloaty head and – the bane of all human existence – Elvis impersonators.

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

SPORTS

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: 00/01

BENCHMARK GAME



PCZ #96 • 93%

✪ This update for the greatest management game ever sees the series improve yet again. New features include increased media involvement, greater backroom staff participation, a live league table and more player information. All this adds to the game's addictiveness, which will once again drain you of your free time and take over your life.

PUBLISHER Eidos • 020 8636 3000



TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2 — PCZ #98 • 88%

✪ *Pro Skater 2* is an unbelievable experience. The sense of speed and balance is uncanny, and there is almost as much satisfaction to be had from pulling off an acrobatic new move as there is from watching your skater break every bone as he smashes his face against the concrete.

PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525



VIRTUAL POOL 3 — PCZ #99 • 85%

✪ *VP3* has the perfect physics and graphics of its predecessors plus some cool new features, including multiplayer options, career mode and training videos by pool diva Jeanette Lee. It's the best pool sim you can buy, and it's almost as good as the real thing.

PUBLISHER Interplay • 020 7551 4266



FIFA 2001 — PCZ #97 • 83%

✪ Once again the FIFA franchise gets its yearly makeover. There are only minor improvements over the last version, but it's still the best football game for the PC. The player animations and presentation are spot on, but we can't help feeling there's a better football game to come.

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134



SUPREME SNOWBOARDING — PCZ #85 • 83%

✪ Snowboarding is not a sport you'd expect to captivate a PC audience, but this game gives as exhilarating an experience as you could hope for without the risk of breaking a leg. Oh, and all the streetwise attitude you'd expect is there too, of course.

PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 8278060



PGA CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF 2000 — PCZ #92 • 82%

✪ It's really not much different from last year's title, but this edition has enough subtle tweaks to make it a worthwhile purchase. It also has the best control system we've seen in what is definitely the best golf game available.

PUBLISHER Vivendi • 0118 920 9100



NBA LIVE 2000 — PCZ #85 • 82%

✪ As slick as always, but what makes this special is the inclusion of teams from the '50s onwards, comedy haircuts and all. It's not quite as immediate as *Inside Drive*, but is a more complete simulation of the sport all round.

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134



OPEN TENNIS 2000 — PCZ #92 • 81%

✪ Not since *Super Tennis* on the SNES have we had so much fun hitting a ball back and forth over a net. After some initial reluctance, the whole office stopped fragging and started lobbing. Incredibly playable and unsurpassed in multiplayer.

PUBLISHER Cryo • 0121 250 5070



JIMMY WHITE'S CUEBALL 2 — PCZ #68 • 78%

✪ The finest snooker simulation on the PC. Chalk your cue and take on the PC or your mates and, when you're tired of the baize, you can move round and have a go on the fully featured darts board instead. Saves going down to the Working Men's Club.

PUBLISHER Virgin/Interplay • 020 7551 4266



ACTUA SOCCER 3 — PCZ #72 • 72%

✪ If you can't get on with *FIFA* then *Actua* is the second port of call for footy fans. It plays a faster game and there's a good range of options and a huge number of teams to play against, which goes a long way to helping maintain its shelf life.

PUBLISHER Gremlin Interactive • 0114 273 8601

3D ACTION/STRATEGY

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: COLD WAR CRISIS

BENCHMARK GAME



PCZ #104 • 90%

✪ The most anticipated military game of the year was worth all the hype and more. This squad-based shooter can be played in both third- and first-person and is the ultimate military simulation package, with a stunning atmosphere and superb mission structures. Lock yourself away because this game deserves your full attention.

PUBLISHER Codemasters • 01926 814132



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS — PCZ #79 • 88%

✪ You don't get a second chance in a real war, and *Hidden & Dangerous* is the game that comes closest to putting you in the middle of hell on earth. It grabs you by the balls from the first mission and doesn't let up.

PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive • 01753 722900



HOSTILE WATERS — PCZ #101 • 87%

✪ A brilliant RTS/action game that you can play purely strategically or leap into a unit and get up close and personal to the action. It's just a shame there aren't any multiplayer options though. Why make love when you can make war?

PUBLISHER Rage • 01512 372200



GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO — PCZ #95 • 85%

✪ This mammoth and original 3D action/strategy game includes third-person shooter, RTS, RPG and real-time combat elements. It also features a superbly balanced multiplayer option and almost naked women, which usually makes for a good time.

PUBLISHER Interplay • 020 7551 4266



SWAT 3: ELITE EDITION — PCZ #97 • 84%

✪ AI doesn't come much better. The spectacular graphics and command system come alive here. Although not as fun as *Counter-Strike*, it's more realistic, and features five new maps and countless weapon configurations.

PUBLISHER Vivendi • 0118 920 9100



SPEC OPS 2 — PCZ #84 • 82%

✪ When *Spec Ops 2* came out it challenged *Hidden & Dangerous* for the top spot. The game puts you in charge of a four-man green beret squad intent on staying alive and shooting the enemy in the head. Incredibly realistic, with top-notch sound.

PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive • 01753 722900



WARGASM — PCZ #71 • 81%

✪ Famed for their flight sims, DID finally deliver an action game only they could produce. With helicopters, APCs and hapless infantry running about, this is as fast-paced as a tank game could be – and it's even better to share.

PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 827 8000



RAINBOW SIX GOLD PACK EDITION — PCZ #81 • 81%

✪ A landmark game in third-person action strategy games that was only surpassed by *Hidden & Dangerous*. Take control of your elite anti-terrorist squad, plan your missions ahead and indulge in some old fashioned killing. Also contains the *Eagle Watch* add-on pack

PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive • 01753 854 444



BATTLEZONE 2 — PCZ #84 • 79%

✪ Stunning graphics and a winning blend of strategy and first-person action in this sequel to the highly acclaimed *Battlezone*. A smooth gaming engine and a good variety of missions meant that the fight for world domination never looked so good.

PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525



DELTA FORCE: LAND WARRIOR — PCZ #99 • 69%

✪ It might not be a *Counter-Strike* or a *Project IGI*, however the *Delta Force* series does have a loyal following who will probably buy it anyway. Superb multiplayer action and very challenging on the highest difficulty level, but unfortunately dodgy AI.

PUBLISHER Novalogic • 020 7405 1777

FLIGHT SIMS

BATTLE OF BRITAIN

BENCHMARK GAME



PCZ #99 • 89%

Allow yourself to be immersed in one of the most exciting and realistic combat flight sims around. The action is non-stop, the skies are crowded and the flight models actually 'feel right'. Even though the graphics and general gameplay may not be ground-breaking, *Battle Of Britain* is one of the best examples of a game that transports you right into the cockpit. Tally ho!

PUBLISHER Empire Interactive • 020 8343 7337



FALCON 4

PCZ #72 • 88%

We waited patiently for years for this title to arrive, and the good news is that, for once, we weren't disappointed. *Falcon 4* features incredible 3D-accelerated graphics and a dynamic campaign structure.

PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 8278060



B-17: THE MIGHTY 8TH

PCZ #96 • 87%

B17 reproduces the experience of piloting a WWII bomber. Everything's covered, from planning missions to dropping bombs. A must for WWII and realism freaks.

PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 8278060



COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2

PCZ #97 • 87%

If WWII dogfighting is your thing, then this is the game you have been waiting for. Its excellent user interface, engrossing campaigns, intense combat and superb graphics create a true sense of excitement and realism.

PUBLISHER Microsoft • 0845 7002000



EUROFIGHTER TYPHOON

PCZ #103 • 85%

Finally a flight sim that values the 'flight' aspect over the 'sim' so you can just enjoy the gameplay. *Tycoon* marks the future of the genre where the campaign engine takes care of itself while you play at being Tom Cruise.

PUBLISHER Rage Software • 0151 237 2200

SPACE COMBAT

X – BEYOND THE FRONTIER

BENCHMARK GAME



PCZ #82 • 87%

The spirit of *Elite* lives on in this massive trading epic from Germany, in which you must buy and fight your way back home to Earth. The combat side of the gameplay may not be the best on offer, but with goods to trade and races to discover, it rewards patience with variety and months of play. This title is deeply hypnotic and beautiful, rather than tense and frenetic.

PUBLISHER THQ • 01483 767656



TERMINUS

PCZ #93 • 86%

Who says the days of independent bedroom programming are over? *Terminus* proves you can make a great game on your own if you have the talent and the passion. It just edges out *FreeSpace 2*.

PUBLISHER Vicarious Visions • www.vvisions.com



FREESPACE 2

PCZ #84 • 85%

Completely different from *X*, *FreeSpace 2* offers fast-paced dogfighting action all the way. It boasts a superb interface, epic story and amazing graphics, but it's a bit short-lived if you don't play online.

PUBLISHER Interplay • 020 7551 4266



EDGE OF CHAOS: INDEPENDENCE WAR 2

PCZ #104 • 83%

It's likely to appeal more to die-hard space simmers, but *Edge Of Chaos* still takes steps to advancing the genre. Its graphics and absorbing free-form gaming are inspirational.

PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 827 8000



X-WING: ALLIANCE

PCZ #77 • 81%

At last! Fly the Millennium Falcon in the final episode of the long-running *X-Wing* series. Certainly the best-looking *X-Wing* game to date, *Alliance* is slow at first, but boy does it pick up later on.

PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525

ALL-TIME CLASSICS



***ZONE* section editor and RPG and RTS enthusiast *Rhianna Pratchett* selects her favourite all-time classic games**



HEAD OVER HEELS

I remember getting addicted to Ocean's *Head Over Heels* at the tender age of ten. Within this massive isometric world you had to negotiate with two mutant dog-type characters – Mr Head, who could float and Mr Heels who could run fast. Together they made the ultimate character combo and pissed all over Batman.



COVERT ACTION

A truly great action strategy game, the *Deus Ex* of its day and just begging to be remade. You played a Mr/Ms Bond-type character who engaged in all sorts of wire-tapping, house-breaking and car-chasing antics to try and collect evidence against masterminds, evil geniuses and all manner of cat fondlers.



WOLFENSTEIN 3D

Back in the good old days *Doom* might have been the first FPS to win all the praise, but there was life before it and I personally have a real soft spot for *Wolfenstein 3D*. The first game ever to really tap into our desire to shoot Germans, which has became one of the enduring gaming themes.



DUNGEON KEEPER 2

The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game. With one of my top five gaming moments, where a creature wins the jackpot, fireworks come out of the casino, the sound of *Disco Inferno* permeates through your dungeon and all your minions adopt *Saturday Night Fever* moves. Class.



UNREAL TOURNAMENT

Maybe not as fast as *Quake III* or as sneaky as *Counter-Strike* but there is no finer feeling in a FPS than to take someone's head off with a ripper razor blade. No giant eyeballs on legs, but what it does have is genuinely challenging maps and superior weapons. Bloodbath? Just show me the way.



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

This superb RPG has an unsurpassed storyline and real depth of character. With an exceptionally dark and decayed atmosphere, it really feels like the developers have clued into what the *Forgotten Realms* was really about. Totally weird with flashes of brilliance, it's a must for any hardcore RPGer.



DIABLO/DIABLO II

Myself and our reviewer Mr Hill still have unfinished business over this. *Diablo* is the ultimate isometric hack 'n' slash and *Diablo II* builds upon the beautiful formula established by its predecessor. I've lost more hours of my life to these than anything else, and tested the patience of several boyfriends. You or *Diablo*? Don't make me choose.



BALDUR'S GATE

The dog's bollocks when it comes to party-based RPGs with an even better sequel. The sheer amount of character classes, missions, sub-missions and playable hours is immense. I'd be hard pushed to choose between this and *Planescape: Torment* but what the hell – I'll have both. I've got a whole lifetime to use up.



COMMAND & CONQUER/RED ALERT

Two of the great RTS classics long before the 'harvest, build, kill' theme became tired and outdated. If I cut my strategy teeth on *Dune 2* then I attended my first day at school with *Command & Conquer* and had my first snog with *Red Alert*. Fond memories indeed.

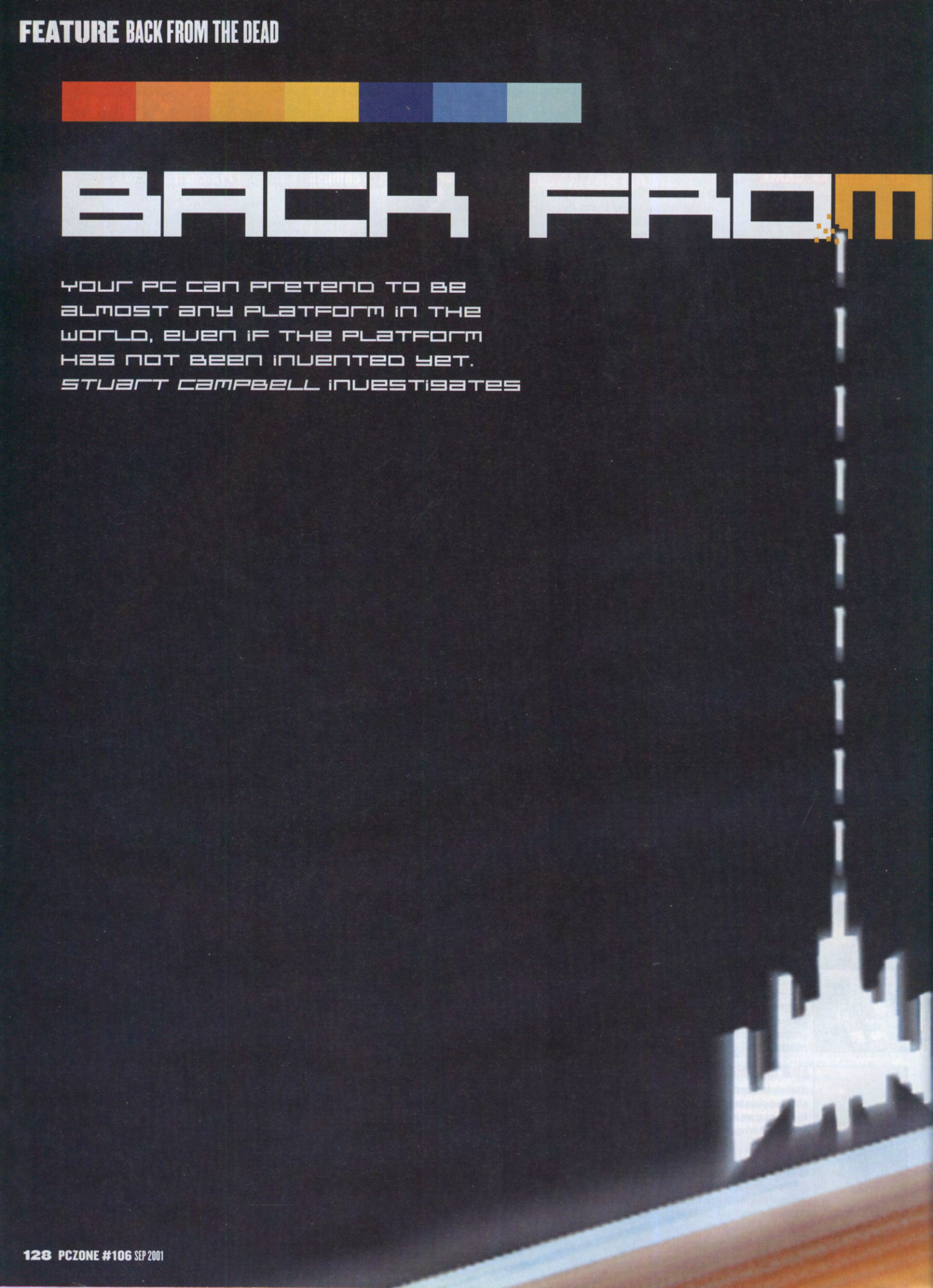


THIEF 2

This is still the best stealth game out there. The execution is beautiful and the intense gaming atmosphere remains a rare quality. When you start a mission armed with a few twigs with water balloons stuck to the end and a rubber truncheon, you know you're in for an interesting time.

BACK FROM

Your PC can pretend to be almost any platform in the world, even if the platform has not been invented yet. *Stuart Campbell* investigates



THE DEAD

It's been a while since we gave any coverage to the thriving emulation scene, so this month thought we'd bring you a nice round-up of what's hot in the world of old games on new PCs. As luck would have it though, it just so happens by coincidence that the biggest thing to hit the world of emulation since the advent of legendary arcade emulator MAME is taking off right now. Naturally, this being *PC ZONE*, we wanted to bring you the lowdown straight away, so we got on the phone to the world's foremost emulation expert Stuart Campbell and demanded that he bring us up to speed. He graciously agreed. Although we did have to pay him. Join him now for a guide to all that's good and new in modern emulation...



Would you ever see this game again without an emulator? (MAME)



Toki, a slightly obscure but utterly fantastic arcade platformer. (MAME)

Hello, all! As I, a roving freelance journalist, travel the length and breadth of the globe in search of the finest in gaming entertainment to share with all my mag-reading chums, one of the recurring themes I hear, in various languages and from gamers of all shapes, sizes, colours and strange personal habits, is this: "One of the defining characteristics of the last generation of videogaming, Stu", they say to me on the hot windswept prairies of the Gambia, atop the icy Steppes of Siberia, and amid the fetid squalor of Chipping Sodbury, "has been the rise in the 'post-pub' game. That is to say, those games that offer simple yet instantly rewarding play, with rules and gameplay simple enough for a bunch of half-drunk yobs to master to a functional level without a six-hour drying-out period. You know, like *Bomberman* and *Wipeout* and stuff."

And of course, all these people are right (which proves beyond dispute that we're all brothers under the skin, and ought to end all wars immediately and love each other in peace for all eternity, but that's another story entirely). 'Post-pub' gaming is great. However, the PC has always traditionally been left out of the fun. Firstly because instantly accessible and fun games have been in short supply on our cream-coloured wonder boxes for years, and secondly because those PC games that do provide easy-to-grasp multiplayer laughs usually require either an online connection or a LAN set-up, neither of which are advisable things to be tackling when you're halfway out of your box. You just can't gather around a PC in the same way you can sprawl across the living room floor in front of your big telly and you can't use a mouse on your lap.

"Far more popular than online gaming, statistics suggest emulation fans number in the millions"

BETTER EMULATED THAN NEVER

However, if you think the console kids get all the fun, you've overlooked one area of the PC that's huge, but still predominantly underground: emulation. The world of emulation is a curiously underexposed niche of PC gaming. Despite being far more popular than, say, online gaming (statistics suggest active emulation fans number in the millions, compared to the mere tens of thousands who regularly play online), it's an area that receives little coverage in the press.

Perhaps it's the stigma attached to the nostalgia that underpins much 'retro' gaming, or the slightly suspect legality of the whole thing, but whatever the reason, the everyday PC gamer is missing out on some of the greatest and most wide-ranging gaming entertainment money can't buy, not to mention a glimpse at some gaming history that, were it not for the timely intervention of the emulation community, would risk being carelessly lost to posterity for good.

Put simply, an emulator is a piece of code that enables your PC to pretend to be another platform. And, if you need further weight behind the argument that the PC is the best gaming platform, then you only need to point to the fact that your beige box can in a blink of an eye become an arcade machine – almost up to the machines that are sitting on a ship from Japan waiting to be installed in your local Namco wonderland). It can imitate any number of consoles (including ones that have only just gone on sale) and even recreate all those fabulous pinball tables that are disappearing from pubs faster than decent pints of beer.

The other beauty of emulators is that, for the most part, they're available free of charge on the Internet. One classic aberration from this is Bleem!, the infamous PlayStation emulator that Sony unsuccessfully tried to bury with serious legal action. Never the best, and still buggy on release, I'm ignoring it in this round-up to concentrate on



MONEY TO BURN?

If I was a rich man, bah-da-da-da-da, etc, etc

The only problem with playing old arcade games on the PC is that they were designed to be played in a standing position, with a sturdy joystick, built-in ashtray and a flat roof to park your drinks on while you racked up the high score. Play any of the manic scrolling shoot 'em ups with a gamepad or keyboard and you'll never emulate your past glories. The only answer is to shell out the best part of a grand for a cabinet like this which hides your PC away inside and provides two arcade joysticks for you to hammer away on. Shell out even more and you can get a coinbox (you've got to make your money back somehow) or a nice leather stool to take the weight of your feet. For more information check out www.arcadepc.co.uk.

STRANGE BUT TRUE

After filth? The Japanese are the masters...

For a country that sells fresh schoolgirl panties from vending machines on the street, it shouldn't come as any surprise to find out that some Japanese arcade games are bizarre and deeply disturbing. The schoolgirl theme is the one that keeps coming back, with scantily clad kids barely out of nursery school imploring you to answer general knowledge questions or play virtual cards with the promise of a sneak peek at their wares if you're successful. One of our favourites is *Poker Ladies*, an extremely rude animated-strip video poker game featuring disembodied groping hands, syringes full of water being squirted in odd places and people shining torches at each other in 'unusual' ways. The *ZONE* team has already booked their tickets.



The Japanese, eh? You've got to love them. (MAME)



Marvel Super Heroes – Final Burn lets you play this at home.

the fabulous stuff that people do for the love of the game.

Emulation in its most basic form has been around since 1964 when an engineer at IBM, Larry Moss, devised a hardware/software combo that enabled high-end (at the time) machines to run software designed for older mainframes. Yawn. Scoot through to 1982 and you come to the birth of videogame emulation with the ColecoVision console, which effectively enabled users to play Atari 2600 cartridges consoles. Atari sued, but lost. The golden age of emulation though kicked off in 1989 and is going stronger now than ever before.

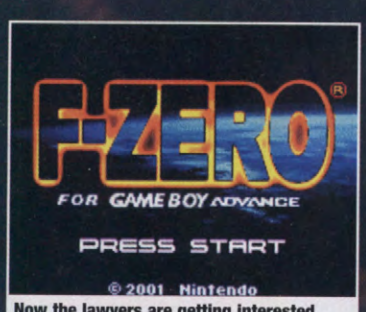
Although the scene is way too vast to cover in its entirety, there are big things afoot, so here, for your delectation is a round-up of the latest developments in this uniquely dynamic area, along with a special report into the latest (and some might say greatest) big new thing.

SIGN YOUR MAME (ACROSS MY HEART)

Hopefully, you'll know all about MAME by now. From a simple *Pac-Man* emulator four years ago, Nicola Salmoria's Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator has grown into a gargantuan many-authored project that offers perfect recreation of almost 3,000 old coin-op videogames. Recently, however, MAME had its most significant overhaul since its birth, when the entirety of the core code was re-written as a Windows, rather than DOS, program. The most significant results of this were the additions of several new features like picture-stretching and smoothing (all games now automatically occupy the maximum possible amount of screen space while remaining in proportion, and have authentically fuzzy edges rather than PC-monitor jagged lines), and a dramatic boost in the speed of many newer games, such as the Midway *Wolf* and *Y-Unit* series (including titles such as *NBA Jam*, *Ultimate Mortal Kombat*, *Total Carnage* and *Terminator 2 – Judgement Day*), which are now realistically playable in MAME for the first time. In fact, MAME now more or less goes all the way up to the end of the PCB-based coin-op. (Most modern arcade games now run on dedicated hardware with very game-specific control set-ups, rather than the circuit-board-in-a-generic-box model that persisted up to the late 1990s.) With this latest version, chances are the PC you're using now is finally capable of running just about any PCB-based arcade game ever written. Check out the boxout on the right for our ten favourite games.

RING OF FIRE

Coming out of nowhere, and vanishing almost as fast, not many emulators are better named than Final Burn. Initially designed to run a bunch of old Sega arcade games not covered by MAME, such as *Afterburner*, *Thunder Blade* and *Galaxy Force 2*, the emu world really sat up and took notice when Final Burn developed support for CPS-2, the name of the coin-op hardware standard used by Capcom (right up to the present day) for the majority of its renowned 2D fighting games.



Now the lawyers are getting interested.



Remember this? (MAME)

OUR TOP TEN MAME GAMES

Don't agree with our choice? Well with over 2000 games to choose we were always going to annoy someone...

1 GALAGA

A new breed of Galaxians where the aliens swoop in from the sides and try to kidnap your ships with their super-death rays. The brave let this happen and then recapture the ship for double-power. A pure unadulterated classic.



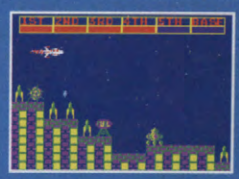
2 MR DO

Simply the best? Arguably, because the subtle and sublimely tuned gameplay only becomes apparent after a few dozen games. Think *Pac Man* and *Dig Dug*, but better than both.



3 SCRAMBLE

The best scrolling shoot 'em up? Possibly not, but *Scramble* is probably the most evocative of all the early retro games because of the switch from a simplistic *Space Invaders* style to this unrivalled vision of beauty.



4 TEHKAN WORLD CUP

Famous for its two-player double trackball cocktail-table cabinet, playing it with a joystick makes it easier to score tons of great goals, like Beckham-style punts from inside your own half and running round the keeper three times before banging it in.



5 PAC GAL

Bloody hard variation on a bloody hard original. Add lipstick, better maps and the same never-been-bettered sound effects. The game that proves that five minutes of fun every day keeps the doctor away.



6 PANG

Split bubbles into smaller bubbles and keep poking away until there's none left. It sounds easy, but when you make a mistake and pick a power-up that converts four enormous ones into about three thousand smaller ones you're in big, big trouble.



7 SUPER SPACE INVADERS

Just like the original, but with aliens that split in two, grow, drop down on you and other things the mind couldn't even conceive in 1978. Add motherships, cattle mutilation and you've got the best update of the first arcade game to make it big in the UK.



8 DEFENDER

One of the first arcade games to introduce the punter to a bewildering number of buttons. This put a load of people off. Others were suckered in with the metallic sound effects and the blistering speed.



9 GOLDEN AXE

Death Adder, you must remember him? And those great big bald chaps with their great big mallet things. When this first hit the arcade we were completely hooked and wasted more money on this than any other multiplayer game in existence.



10 GAUNTLET

Four-player multiplayer action and classic moments such as 'your wizard is about to die'. Cries of 'don't open that door and let those ghosts out' went unheeded as greed took over and every player raced to get all the treasures for himself.



I AM THE LAW

Emulation... Great fun, but will it get you sent to jail?

As you probably know by now, emulation is a pretty grey area in the eyes of the law. While it's generally accepted (except by Nintendo) that emulating consoles in itself doesn't break any laws, using those emulators to play old games generally does (unless you own 'legitimate' copies of every game you play on an emulator). Most emulation fans draw a moral line between emulation of old, 'dead' systems like the Spectrum or Mega Drive, and emulation of more current machines from which publishers still make money, like the GameBoy Advance, whose emulation Nintendo has recently, and predictably, been making a fuss about. Even there, though, it's difficult to see the harm – after all, the whole point of the GameBoy is that you can stick it in your pocket and take it on the bus, which is both impractical and uncomfortable with your PC. The US and European videogame trade bodies, IDSA and ELSPA, have done their level best to crush fan-run emulation websites wherever they've found them (short-sightedly storing up pointless ill will and resentment among dedicated gamers as they do so). A much more sensible approach seems to be being adopted by Williams, who not only hasn't thrown lawsuits around to prevent the distribution of its old pinball ROMs, but has made them freely available for download on their own website. Whether they continue to take this enlightened and admirable outlook as *Visual Pinball* grows in popularity remains to be seen.



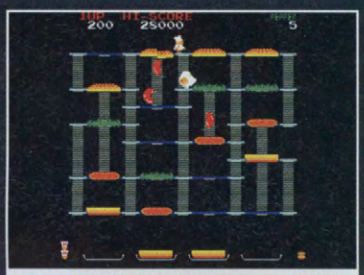
Judge Dredd (© Rebellion, ironically enough) says: "Don't do it, punks. Whatever it is."



A shot of *GoldenEye*? Oh, OK then. (Project 64.)



Anyone speak Japanese? (MAME)



Feeling peckish? It's *Burger-Time*. (MAME)

Suddenly, from being almost bereft of even halfway-decent examples of the genre, PC owners are now spoiled for choice, with titles like *Marvel Super Heroes*, *Vampire Savior*, *X-Men: Children Of The Atom* and *Street Fighter Alpha 3* (as well as non-beat-'em-ups like *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Super Puzzle Fighter*) all running perfectly even on pretty clunky PC set-ups. Final Burn is now no longer being developed (there's basically no need – it already does everything it set out to do), but new games continue to be made available for it (CPS-2 games require special decoder tables to run, and the emu community is observing a self-imposed embargo on releasing games that are still making money in arcades), and CPS-2 support has also been incorporated, albeit requiring considerably higher system specs, into recent versions of MAME.

TROUBLE IN STORE

Until recently, the darkest days of emulation were widely held to be those of a couple of years ago when the Nintendo 64 emulator UltraHLE was released. Not that it wasn't a superb emulator – it's probably still technically unrivalled – but because at the time the N64 was still (just about) an economically-viable console, and given the relatively small and hence easily-downloadable size of N64 games (from four to 30Mb), it seemed reasonable to claim that the emulator stood a real chance of doing the company whose games the authors purported to love some genuine damage.

> **"The emu community is observing a self-imposed embargo on releases that are still making money"**

The N64 emulator UltraHLE set not one but two benchmarks in emulation. As well as being the most technically-stunning emu ever (which it still is), it was also the shortest-lived, notching up mere days on public release before being discontinued by the authors under the threat (albeit a threat largely unfounded in law) of heavy legal action from Nintendo. It's taken until now for another N64 emu even vaguely as good to come along, and as the console splutters out its last days, hopefully the lawyers will keep their hungry beaks away from this one. The Windows-based Project 64 does an excellent job (although like its predecessor it's a bit choosy about video cards), and is slightly more compatible with game software than UHLE was. If you've got the right card and a fairly chunky CPU, stand by for some fun.

Recently, though, a clutch of emus (*A flock, surely? – Sir David Attenborough*) have been released which, while technically less dramatic, actually came out before the machine they emulated had been released anywhere in the world. The successful pre-launch emulation of the GameBoy Advance sent shock waves through both the emu scene and the games industry, and had Nintendo in particular in a right old lather, much as you'd expect. To be honest, it's a bit of a fuss about nothing at the moment. None of the major GBA emulators (there's little to choose between Virtual GBA, iGBA and Boycott Advance – though each is better for running particular games) have sound, they only run a few games and you need a pretty tasty PC to get full speed out of them. But given the speed of emulation development, it won't be long until those deficiencies are ironed out, at which point things should get really interesting.

STAY OFF THE ROOF, ROD

All the emus you'll ever need are here

www.mame.net Latest MAME news and downloads

www.retrogames.com General emulation news, downloads and links. Also hosts CPS2Shock, which is the primary source of new decoder tables for CPS-2 games

www.finalburn.com Final Burn homepage

http://igba.multimania.com iGBA homepage

http://boycottadvance.emuunlim.com Boycott Advance homepage

http://www.komkon.org/fms/VGB/ Virtual GBA homepage

http://www.pj64.net/ Project 64 homepage

DID YOU TILT MY PINTP

The single biggest emulation movement since MAME is coming...

So, between MAME, Final Burn and the host of proprietary emulators, your PC can run pretty much every videogame ever invented. But emulation doesn't stop there. If you're a pinball fan, then something's happened recently that you definitely need to know about.

As you'll already know, pinball is an area of post-pub-style gaming where the PC excels. While it's a genre of game traditionally not well catered-for on console, the PC has a small handful of truly excellent pinball games. *Addiction Pinball*, the *Pro Pinball* series, *Microsoft Pinball Arcade* and the likes of *Judge Dredd* and *The Avengers* from cunningly named developer Pin-Ball Games are all terrifically entertaining. However, they have a couple of big drawbacks. Firstly, they're not based on real-life tables (except Microsoft's offering, but most of *Pinball Arcade*'s tables are clunky old relics from the 1950s or even earlier). And secondly, chances are you won't have bought them in the first place, because a pinball game with its single static screen and old-fashioned points-based gameplay seems a bit of a frivolous purchase on the PC. The same money could get you a huge, expansive *Deus Ex*, a life-swallowing *Age Of Empires 2* or, God have mercy on your miserable souls, a *Championship Manager 4*. But what if, when you all staggered back home, you and your chums could play the exact same pinballs that you'd just been playing in the pub, and for free to boot? Wouldn't that be brilliant? Well, you can't. Sorry.

"The only caveat is that at the moment you need a pretty hefty PC to run some of the authentic tables"

TELEGRAM FOR MR BUNNY!

Ha ha! I'm joking, of course. In fact, the fastest-growing community in the world of free software since the advent of the mighty arcade emulator MAME is that which has sprung up around the astonishing *Visual Pinball*, the sole work of Californian Randy Davis.

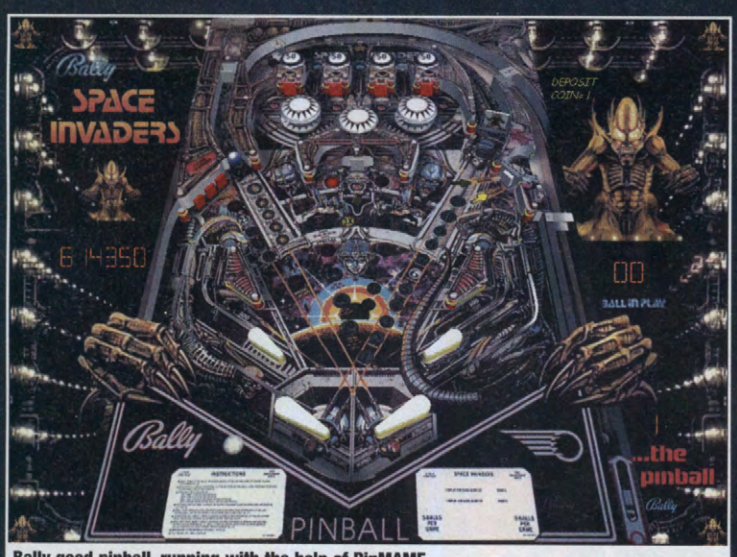
"*Visual Pinball* originally started, in 1997, because I was working on a set of ActiveX components at work," says Davis, "which could be dropped into a Visual Basic form and scripted together to produce more complex productivity apps. Somehow I got the idea that it was similar to a pinball game which had many parts that could be hooked together to form a complex game. I had always wanted to write a pinball game, but because I had no clue how I would even begin the physics engine. Thus the first version was born, but it wasn't that good – it was 2D, the physics were a mess, and the VB interface, while cool from a techie standpoint, wasn't up to the task of designing pinball games. I put it on the shelf until last year, when I got to brainstorming about physics engines, and I decided that I could pull off the pinball idea much better than before. As I played around with my new engine, I realised I had something pretty good."

The good thing that Davis realised he had was a program that could not only build pinball tables generally, but could also, for practically the first time in history, bring real, arcade pins to a home-gaming audience. Until now, the entire history of videogaming on all formats could offer gamers fewer than a dozen conversions of genuine coin-op pinball games to play, but in just a couple of months, VP's simple construction-kit-and-editor set-up has caught on like a dose of foot-and-mouth. Keen pinballers have used it, in conjunction with original artwork and sampled sound either archived on the Web or photographed and recorded from their own tables, to construct exact playable replicas of well over 100 arcade pinball machines. These range all the way from the birth of pinball in the late 1920s to the hugely successful machines of pinball's heyday, the 1970s. And with some of those machines only known to have one or two surviving examples in existence, the resurrection has come just in the nick of time.

The only caveat at the moment is that you need a pretty hefty PC to run some of the authentic tables, but that's a given with any new emulator.

WILD, WILD WEST (WICKY WICKY WAA)

"I'm certainly surprised how popular it has become", says Davis. "I remember getting mail just after releasing the first beta – somebody had posted the first user-made table (the conversion of *Wild West* from Codemasters' *Psycho Pinball*) within five hours of VP being



Bally good pinball, running with the help of PinMAME.

GROWING YOUR OWN

***Visual Pinball* isn't just a simulation/emulation tool, of course – it's an all-purpose construction kit, with which you can create new, original pinballs just as easily as you can copy real ones. You'll find a few of those on our cover CDs this month (we haven't included any simulated or emulated tables for copyright reasons, obviously). One of the most remarkable aspects of *VP*, though, is its flexibility. As well as straightforward pintables, the engine can also be used to create other mechanical coin-op-style games, or pins which would be impractical in reality.**



An old friend is hiding behind the middle target in this fast reaction game.

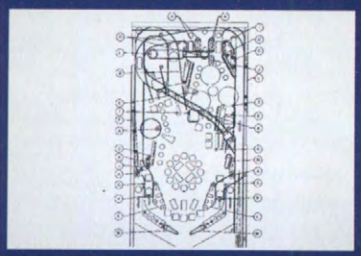


Golf, but with all the walking replaced by maths.

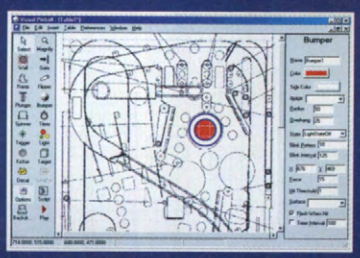
LESSON ONE: DO IT YOURSELF

A brief *Visual Pinball* tutorial

Favourite table still not been released? If you just can't wait, it's not that tough to get started on your own conversion



STEP ONE: A big help is if you can find the game's original manual. These are archived in many places on the Net (see Care In The Community). If you're lucky, the manual will probably include the table's blueprint. (Here we're using Williams' Safecracker.)



STEP TWO: Cut out the table blueprint and import it into *Visual Pinball*. Now you can put bumpers, targets, ramps and so on onto the conveniently marked correct locations, using the program's simple drag-and-drop interface.



STEP THREE: Make sure everything looks OK on the table and carry on.



STEP FOUR: Keep adding the relevant features until the table's complete.



STEP FIVE: Find a graphic of the playfield. Like the manuals, these are archived by pinball-loving souls in many Net locations. Tweak the pic if necessary to fit with the blueprint, then import and superimpose it onto your table. You'll now have a convincing-looking replica of the real table, which you can flip the ball around on. After this things get a bit trickier, and you'll have to start delving into Visual Basic to make the table actually play and score the way it should (the manual will explain all the gameplay rules to you). But by this point you'll probably already be hooked, so cancel all plans for the next few weeks.

OLD BOYS REUNION

All your old gaming pals go pinball

Of course, if you want to make your own table but can't face having to come up with the theme and all the graphics yourself, an obvious source of inspiration is old videogames. The most impressive aspect of these tables – especially the two Mr Do games and the Reactor table – is the way the authors have managed, in addition to taking graphics and sounds from the coin-ops, to incorporate many elements of the original videogame gameplay into their pinball versions. Mildly astoundingly, no one's done a *Pac-Man* or *Donkey Kong* table yet. But they surely will.



Anyone remember *Berzerk*?



Or *Reactor*?



Good old *Mr Do...*



He's got to be worth two tables.

available. That was a pretty amazing feeling to finally get such positive feedback after months of working in the dark."

In the beginning, VP tables tended to be released on a rather unattractive standard Microsoft Turquoise background which made the whole thing feel a little amateurish and scabby. In the VP community spirit, though, an artist going by the name of 'Nicky Special' (real names are rare on the 'scene' – coders, eh?) soon started releasing small add-on files which used the artwork from the coin-op backglasses, cabinets and the original advertising flyers to provide backdrops which, while adding nothing to the gameplay, enhanced the *experience* of play considerably.

"I can't do table-scripting to save my life", says Special, "but backdrops make playing the tables feel much more like the real thing because you're surrounded by all the same images. Basically they're my way of contributing something to the community – any idiot can hack away with Paint Shop Pro. I started with one for *Twilight Zone* just as an experiment, but it went down so well I've now done about 80. What's happening now is that more and more people are either including their own backdrops with their tables, or asking me to do one for them before they release them, which I find really rewarding."



Because VP tables are all produced via Visual Basic scripting, making one is pretty accessible to just about anyone (compared to the coding langauges you'd have to learn to make your own pinball game from scratch, anyway). But if even that's too much work, there are lots of ways to get involved. VP's editor structure makes it incredibly easy to add sounds, graphic images and rule changes to tables without any coding knowledge at all.

Most of the best VP tables are collaborations in this vein from many sources, with people adding their own modifications and having them adopted into the 'official' release.) The primary meeting point is the official VP forum at **www.hippie.net/shivasite/UltraBoard/UltraBoard.cgi** – 'Today's Posts' is the best starting point.



Look, someone's made a *Doom* table complete with authentic sounds. Neato.

Even more exciting developments were to come, though, with the incorporation by some of the development team behind arcade videogame emulator MAME of PinMAME – a little-known MAME offshot project – into the program. While PinMAME didn't actually let you play anything, it produced perfect emulation of the ROM chips of the pintables of the '80s and '90s, giving table authors, for comparatively little effort, the dot-matrix displays, video modes and sophisticated sound and music that characterised the pins still found in pubs and arcades to this day. Obviously, combining VP's table physics and PinMAME's ROM emulation enabled authors to produce the most accurate emulation of modern coin-op pinball possible. At the time of writing, around 40 tables have had the full VPMAME treatment, but new ones appear almost every day.

Playing authentic versions of your favourite pinball tables – like Star Trek: The Next Generation and the all-time classic White Water – is curiously thrilling and if you've got a big monitor (let's say 21 inches at least) eminently playable as well. While *Visual Pinball* had already grabbed the emulation public's attention, the advent of VPMAME, and the infinitely more complex modern pinball games it enables pin-lovers to play on their PCs, is what threatens to take the whole scene mainstream. And, with the decline of pinball in general, and the news that a lot of the big pinball manufacturers are shutting up shop, this is one area of emulation that has extreme historic importance. Pinball shouldn't be allowed to die, and if you agree you can join forces and help us in our crusade.

"Pinball shouldn't be allowed to die, and if you agree you can join forces and help us in our crusade"

We've provided a special full version of *Visual Pinball* on the cover CD and by following the step-by-step tutorial provided and analysing the sample tables on the CD you should be able to come up with a work of genius. Slave away for as long as you can stand, make sure the table works properly and then send your best efforts to us at the usual address: *PC ZONE* Pinball compo, 30 Cleveland St, London, W1P 5FF. Alternatively you can send the tables by email to letters.pczone@dennis.co.uk. Make sure you get them to us by the end of August and we'll stick the best of them on the cover CD, which will both make you famous and help to bring the good name of pinball back into the limelight. PCZ

That's it for now, but we've decided to include a regular look at the world of emulation in our Bulletin section, starting next month. As always, you'd be mad to miss it.

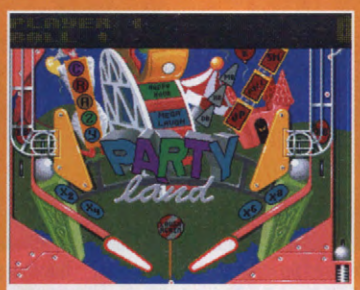


Star Trek: The Next Generation. Worth it for the sound effects alone.

YESTERDAY'S HISTORY TODAY

Rewriting the past, Stalin-style

One of the more interesting aspects of VP is that it's even being used to recreate old MS-DOS pinball games from the pre-3D era. Once-flat, scrolling tables from classics such as *Pinball Dreams*, *Epic Pinball*, *Pinball Fantasies*, *Psycho Pinball* and *Obsession* have all had the 2D-to-3D treatment. It's only to be hoped that the original publishers don't get all huffy about this, which would be pretty churlish, as even if you *can* find the old games now, most of them won't run on modern Windows PCs anyway.



Pinball Fantasies, 1993-stylee.



Pinball Fantasies 2001. Looking good.



Epic Pinball's Excalibur table, but in 3D.



Psycho Pinball's Wild West gets flashy.

CARE IN THE COMMUNITY

The world of emulation is a thriving community in itself.

If you want to get into *VP* check out these sites

http://www.randydavis.com/vp/ *Visual Pinball* homepage (downloads and news)

http://www.thefew.com/vptables/ AJ's VP MAME Downloads (emulated table downloads)

http://irpinball.retrogames.com/ IR Pinball Homepage (simulated and original table downloads)

http://www.gamenewsdirect.com/vpinball World Of Pinball (the first big VP download site – no longer updated, but contains a handy beginner's guide to getting VP MAME running, and hundreds of archive downloads)

http://www.hippie.net/shivasite/ The forum's tremendous parent site also includes a huge archive of other pinball materials, like manuals and flyers, as well as many tables and other file downloads. You can even set up your own section on the server if you plan to contribute tables or graphics.

http://www.pinball.com/ Homepage of Williams, producer of most coin-op pinballs of the last decade or so. Contains artwork, sounds and free downloads of table ROM files.

http://homepages.paradise.net.nz/~frenzy/pinlinks/index.html Pinball Links, a great source of artwork, images, rulebooks etc. for would-be table authors.

RETROZONE

JANUARY 1991

We take an enjoyable stroll down memory lane

CHILD OF THE '90S Rhianna Pratchett

HEADLINES

Operation Desert Storm launches the Gulf War • 13 people die as 100mph winds sweep the UK • Death of King Olav V of Norway • The Oscars feature a record number of entries in the foreign film category • John Major claims the Poll Tax would not be abolished • 60,000 students clash with police in Athens over the death of a teacher • A Chinese aircraft is grounded in Taiwan after eight white mice have the cheek to sneak on board

COVERT ACTION

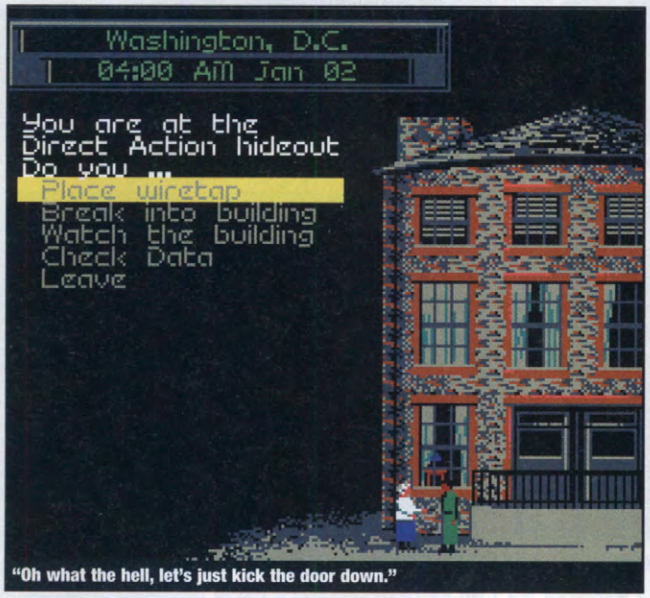
Getting sneaky the old-fashioned way

If there was ever a game that's begging to be remade, it's this Sid Meier classic. Although, some may argue that it already has been made, dressed up in a long black coat and dubbed *Deus Ex. Covert Action* had you slipping into the shoes of the slickest character to ever be named after a shaver, Max Remington, or in the interests of being PC on the PC, Maxine Remington.

The gameplay was a compelling mixture of strategy and puzzler, that involved attempting an assortment of fun stuff along the lines of housebreaking and professional wiretapping, as you collected evidence to nail the bad guys. *Covert Action* left the legacy of teaching us how to be sneaky, vicious and underhand, plus all the other traits that make up some of our great heroes.



Break into everything you can and have a good rummage.



"Oh what the hell, let's just kick the door down."



We all have to answer to the man in the suit at sometime.

THE BEST OF THE REST



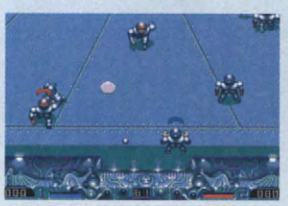
INDIANA JONES & THE LAST CRUSADE
(NES, PC, Sega)

Released on practically everything, this tough little platformer had you racing around air ships, traversing castle walls and avoiding strategically placed rhino horns. Good graphics, infuriating levels, the excuse to shoot Nazis and a bit of whip cracking, and the majority of us were happier for it.



KNIGHTS OF THE SKY
(Amiga, PC, ST)

More shooting Germans in this title, this time from the skies in your bid to become Ace of Aces (this was pre *Top Gun*) during WWI. Although it required quite a powerful machine to run (a whole 13MHz) it was nevertheless an excellent 3D flight sim that simply oozed atmosphere.



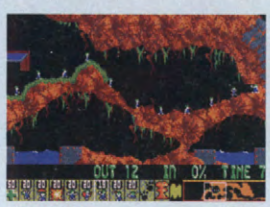
SPEEDBALL 2
(Amiga, PC, ST)

Just when you thought there would be nothing better than *Speedball*, up pops its bigger and faster younger brother. It was also deliciously more violent than its predecessor, with a more rugby-ised, fight-to-the-death feel. The larger pitch and greater control over your player made this a truly great sequel.



TEST DRIVE III
(Amiga, PC, ST)

The driving game for those that liked to drive slowly down long straight American roads in the rain, in a Lamborghini Diablo. Despite some highly detailed 3D vector graphics and decent longevity, this was a bit too much about realism and not enough about speed for most hardened driving enthusiasts.

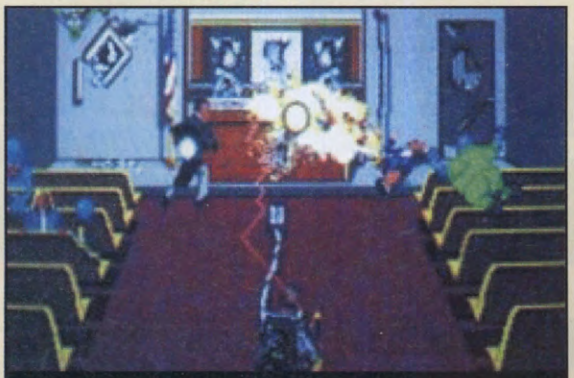


LEMMINGS
(Amiga, PC, ST)

One of the most playable and addictive games of all time, as well as being more bloody annoying than anything else in the world. You had to save them from being nuked, fried, blown up and mutilated, the type of thing that makes top-quality kids' entertainment.

«« STOP PRESS »»

GAMING NEWS FOR JANUARY '91



Who you gonna call? *Ghostbusters 2*, of course.



Just jokin' around.

If you couldn't satisfy your every gaming craving during the hours of daylight then Game Boy was the answer to keeping you occupied beneath your duvet at night, with the Game Light and Light Boy. The Game Light at £10 was basically a small clip-on torch, while for an extra £15, the Light Boy came with a flipdown lens which magnified the screen 1.4 times. Also useful for midnight rearranging of stamp collections.

Film licences started to become even bigger business during this period and there was a surge of big screen to little screen transitions. Leading the way was Ocean with *Total Recall* and *Robocop 2*, adding to its impressive Hollywood stable of *Batman*, *Indiana Jones*, *Ghostbusters 2* and *Robocop*. Some of the games that are probably best forgotten include *Dick Tracy*, *Lethal Weapon and Rambo III*.

Meanwhile, Joystick manufacturer Cheetah hoped to take a slice out of the Game Boy market with its launch of the oddly titled Gamate in the UK. Priced at £59.99, some £10 cheaper than the Game Boy, the Gamate was around the same size, but held horizontally. It suffered somewhat from a poor-quality LCD screen, which was actually painful to look at for any great length of time, and the rather unfortunate name didn't help much either. The general public unsurprisingly did not embrace the idea of staying in to play with their Gamate and the Game Boy reigned supreme.

TOP 5 1991

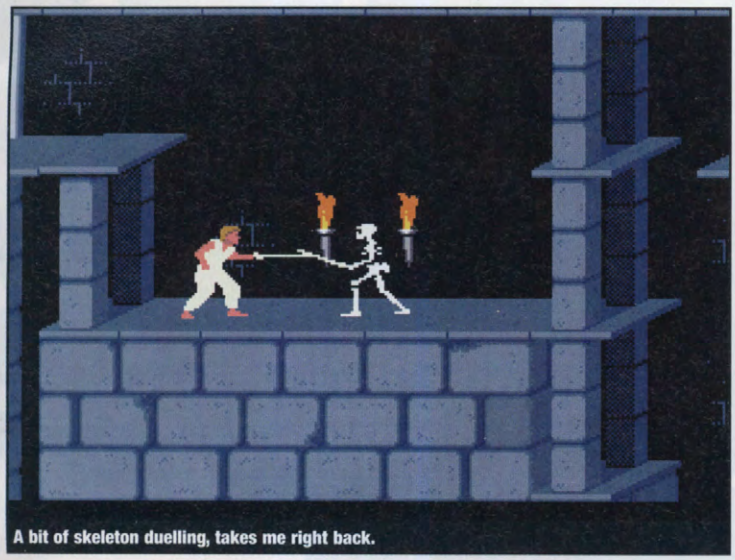
SPECTRUM GAMES

1 JAWS
2 OUT RUN
3 R-TYPE
4 TRACK SUIT MANAGER
5 TARGET RENEGADE

Compiled by Charttrack



Get your motors running...



A bit of skeleton duelling, takes me right back.

PRINCE OF PERSIA

A right little gem of a game

One of those misty-eye inducing type of games. Escape from the dungeons of the evil Grand Vizier Jaffar and rescue the fair princess before he lures her away with smooth talk about smashing orangey bits. The catch is you only have an hour to do it in. One hour of your life, that isn't much is it? How wrong we all were.

Prince Of Persia embodied pixel poetry in motion, and you couldn't fail to be impressed as your little hero leaped, shuffled and clambered his way through the dungeon. The game featured strong level design, incredibly fluid gameplay and some genuinely taxing puzzles. Probably the game most responsible for wide-eyed people walking around muttering, "shuffle, shuffle, jump, spike shuffle, leap, grab ledge, pull up," under their breath.

THE NES IS DEAD LONG LIVE THE SNES!



It's simply a thing of beauty.

The world saw the launch of what many agree to be the premier 16-bit console of all time. Dubbed the Super Famicom in Japan where it was initially released, standing for Family Computer on account of the Japanese gaming ethic, it was known as the SNES over here, presumably because Youngboysintheirbedroomscom wouldn't have fitted on the box.

This sleek grey beast measured a compact 200x240x60mm and boasted a graphics chip with an impressive 32,768 colour display. The only games available for the SNES at the time was the supremely brilliant *Super Mario World*, which came free with the machine and *F-Zero*, which was untouchable by any other racing game at the time.

Importers quoted a £350-400 price tag after Japanese stock sold out almost instantaneously, and rumours spread that Nintendo actually had to deliver its stocks by night to avoid being hijacked. Those who didn't acquire one from mysterious rain-coated strangers, had to wait until September 1991 for the US release, or until April 1992 for its release in the UK.



The game that launched a million crap kart clones.

ON THE CD

More demos, movies, mods and levels than you could possibly imagine ever. And then some

WORDS Rhianna Pratchett and Oliver Cross **DISCS** Lee Cocker

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BEFORE YOU DIAL... IF YOU ARE CALLING THE HELPLINE, PLEASE TAKE NOTE OF THE FOLLOWING POINTS If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call. If this is not possible, note down all relevant information – ie system type, sound card, RAM and so on – plus the nature of the fault. Make sure you have a pen and paper to hand when you call, so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

You need at least a Pentium 266 with 32Mb RAM to run the software on this month's CD-ROMs

Many of the programs on our cover CDs are designed to run under Windows 95/98 and, as a result, some of them may require a Pentium II 300 with 64Mb RAM to run satisfactorily. Please note that some games also require a 3D accelerator card to run. Use the browser and menu system to see which demos are 3D accelerator only

DISCLAIMER

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ON THE CD **DEMOS**



ALONE IN THE DARK: THE NEW NIGHTMARE

Infogrames · Disc 1

EXCLUSIVE



Ah! A dark and mysterious corridor. Let's investigate.

Edward Carnby – whips his weapon out at every opportunity.



A spontaneous rendition of the *Time Warp* will kill off most monsters.



You know what they call men who lurk around in graveyards at night don't you?

The *Alone In The Dark* series has been scaring us witless since 1992, and it kicked off the whole survival horror genre. If that's not credentials enough, then check out the lush graphics and atmospheric lighting on display here. Yep, it's back, and terror has never looked so good.

During this exclusive playable demo you can play the first section of the game as Edward Carnby, paranormal investigator and star of the first three games, albeit in a completely different time period and minus his dodgy facial hair. Which can only be a good thing.

CONTROLS

Move forward/up	Up arrow
Move backward/down	Down arrow
Turn left	Left arrow
Turn right	Right arrow
Action/fire	Spacebar
Flashlight	S
Run	A
Inventory	I
Map radio	M
Radio	R
Freelook	Left Shift
Aim	Left Ctrl



Prepare for nosebleed attacks.

SERIOUS SAM

Take 2 Interactive · Disc 2

EXCLUSIVE

A seriously fun arcade-style shooter for those who hanker for the days when *Doom* reigned supreme. No need to really engage your brain in this demo, just kill anything and everything that moves, growls or runs at you screaming, especially if it doesn't have a head. Not for anyone with a sense of strategy or subtle tactics, but for those of you who like lots of wide-open spaces to wave your weapon in. As well as the single-player mission you can also try your hand at the seriously addictive multiplayer on offer in the full version.

CONTROLS

Weapons select	1 ,2, 3 etc
Move forward	W
Move backward	S
Left	A
Right	D
Look up/down	Mouse
Fire	Left mouse button
Menu	Esc

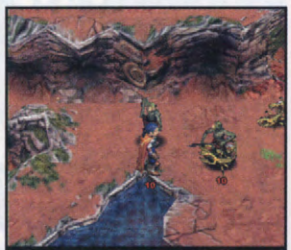
TECHNOMAGE

Infogrames · Disc 2

This cutesy console-like RPG sees you taking on the role of Melvin, a Technomage and the one last hope (because you're never called in as the second-to-last hope) to unite the scientific and magical divide in the land of Gothos. Learn the basics of combat and spell-casting and embark upon a mini-quest.

CONTROLS

Move	Arrow keys, hold right mouse button
Action	Ctrl, left mouse button
Jump	Alt, right mouse button
Cast spells	C
Activate tools	V
Rotate camera Y & X,	Mouse wheel
Inventory	I
Open/close map	M
Open/close quest log	Q
Pause/menu	Esc



Oh that naughty scorpion hurt my toesies.

ROLAND GARROS

Acclaim/Cryo · Disc 2

***Roland Garros* is one of the best tennis games available, even if it doesn't improve upon the previous version, last year's office fave, *Open Tennis 2000*. Take two players through the best of three matches against the computer on the centre court in Paris. There are also two rackets and three difficulty levels to play through, although on the easiest level you might as well be playing a cheeseburger.**

CONTROLS

Move forward	Up arrow/E
Move backward	Down arrow/X
Left	Left arrow/S
Right	Right arrow/F
Top spin	Right Shift
Slice	Right Ctrl



Fore! Whoops wrong game.



It's tennis... and that's it.



Now that's what happens when you run in corridors!

JEKYLL AND HYDE

Acclaim/Cryo · Disc 1

A very Tim Burtonish-meets-*Silent Hill* take on the classic story of man and monster. Make your way around the lunatic asylum, offing those who dribble or lurch, to find your daughter who has been taken prisoner by those of a loony persuasion. But beware of the monster that lurks within. *Cue evil laughter.*

CONTROLS

Need to set the keys in the initial start-up menu

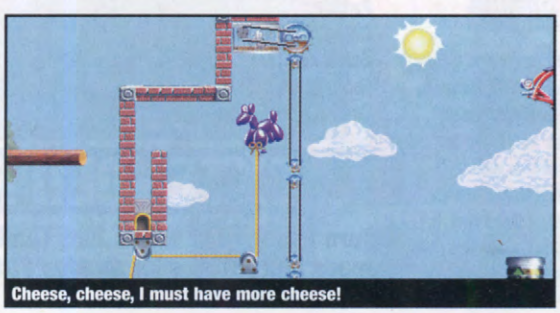
THE INCREDIBLE MACHINE: EVEN MORE CONTRAPTIONS

Sierra · Disc 1

A simple yet devilishly frustrating concept. Solve puzzles by building your own Wallace and Gromit-style machine, involving the inventive placing of conveyor belts, elastic bands, pipes, bits of cheese and various small creatures. Insert rodent into pipe... the first Richard Gere DIY manual perhaps?

CONTROLS

Mouse



Cheese, cheese, I must have more cheese!



Blueprints for the Wimbledon ball boy replacement machine.



Look at me drivin' reaaaal fast.

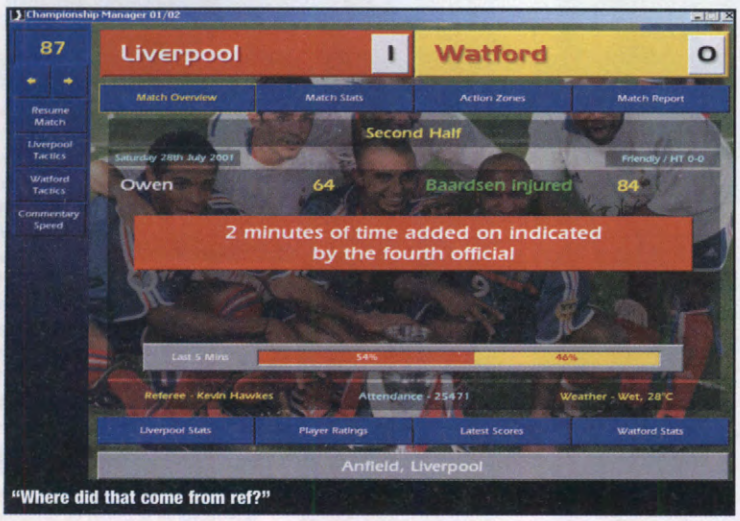
LEADFOOT

Infogrames · Disc 1

This hi-octane driving game sends you bombing around a selection of dirt tracks at ridiculously high speeds, trying to stay on all four wheels. It also features a multiplayer mode, so persuade all of your friends to buy *ZONE* and have a huge ten-way race! (Beer and pizza is, as usual, recommended.) The demo is limited to two tracks, on which you can only drive two cars. You can however race against as many computer opponents as you like.

CONTROLS

Steer	Left, right
Accelerate	Up
Brake	Down
Space	Change camera view
Left shift	Half lock steering
Change gear up	X
Change gear down	Z
Quit (multiplayer)	Esc
Pause (single-player)	Esc
Toggle display of race information	F3
Toggle display of the rear-view mirror	F4



"Where did that come from ref?"

TD ZONE VOLUME 2

Courtesy of www.thedugout.net · CD1

Fact #1: *PC ZONE* is the best games mag in the world. Fact #2: The Dugout is the best *CM* website on the Net. Add the two together for a work of sublime genius

The next update of the superlative *Championship Manager* is almost here and what better way to celebrate than with volume two of our collaboration with The Dugout, the premier *CM* website. This month there's a guide to the Spanish League, along with a few hotshot Spanish youngsters to move in on. Plus we show you how to create a network game, and bring you the latest files and updates, along with breaking news for the *01/02* update and the forthcoming *CM4*. Next month, we're heading off to France for a few bottles of vin rouge and a quick look at the First Division, along with more tips, tutorials and a huge preview of *01/02*. As always, big thanks to Mark Geneste for the content, and check out www.thedugout.net, which includes regular updates, in-depth tutorials and custom graphics.

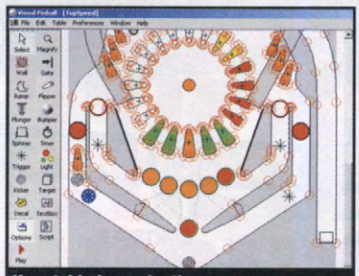
VISUAL PINBALL

Randy Davis · Disc 1

Remember the good old days, when the best thing to do with your spare change was play pinball? Still remember the exact layout of your favourite table? Now you can recreate it with *Visual Pinball*. There's a couple of sample tables included so that you can see exactly how to put your own together. For more detailed information, see the feature and step-by-step tutorial starting on page 128.

CONTROLS

Left flipper	Left Shift
Right flipper	Right Shift
Tilt left	Z
Tilt right	/
Tilt centre	Spacebar
Plunger	Enter



Your table in production



Your table after production

FROM DUSK TILL DAWN

Acclaim/Cryo · Disc 1

OK, so this third-person shooter is about five years too late, but better late than never we say. You play a George Clooney lookalike on a mission to clear a prison of a nasty vampire infestation. It's work still in progress so don't get too agitated, but it's enough to give you a taste. Set your own keys when you launch the game.

ON THE CD HOTSHOTS CD1

Alien Vs Predator 2 Promo
See the scariest FPS in action and then read our cover feature, which starts on page 34

ON THE CD MODWATCH CD1

Half-Life: Deathmatch Classic
Operation Stingray 2.01
Western Quake III
Liquid 3.0
Wanted!

ON THE CD PATCHES CD1

Quake III Arena Point Release 1.29f Beta

ON THE CD PATCHES CD2

Black & White Developers' Beta Patch
Clive Barker's Undying Texture Patch
C&C: Red Alert 2 v1.006
Echelon
Fallout Tactics v1.27
Grand Prix Legends v1.2
Links 200 v1.21
Myst III Exilw v1.2
No One Lives Forever Update 3
RealMYST v1.1.1
Sacrifice Update 3
Summoner v1.30
Summoner Demo Patch
Virtual Pool 3 v3.0.9.9

ON THE CD EXTENDED PLAY CD2

Turn to page 142 where Tony Lamb brings you the best in maps, mods and patches for *Sudden Strike*, *Alien Vs Predator* and *Team Fortress Classic*.

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Alien vs Predator	FA P.L. F'ball Man. '00	Men in Black	Soldier of Fortune
Alone in the Dark 4	FA P.L. F'ball Man. '01	Midtown Mad. 1&2	Star Lancer
Andosia War	FA18 Hornet 3	Need For Speed 2	Star Trek: Elite Forces
Asheron's Call	Falcon 4	NFS 3: Hot Pursuit	Star Wars: Jedi Knight
Baldur's Gate	Flight Unlimited 2	No One Lives Forever	StarCraft
Black & White	Gangsters	Nocturne	Starship Troopers
Black Dahlia	Giants: Citizen Kabuto	Nomad Soul	Sudden Strike
Blair Witch Volume 3	Grand Theft Auto 1&2	Pharoah	Summoner
Broken Sword 1 & 2	Grim Fandango	Pharoah: Cleopatra	Swat 3
Champ. Man. Series	GTA: London 1969	POD	The Moon Project
Comm & Conq Series	Gunman Chronicles	Populous	The Sims
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Cossaks: Euro Wars	Half Life: Blue Shift	Rayman 2	Theme Hospital
Curse Monkey Island	Heroes of M&M III	Red Alert 2 (C & C)	Theme Park Inc
Dark Colony	Hidden & Dangerous	Resident Evil 2	Thief 2: Metal Age
Death Trap Dungeon	Hitman	Rogue Spear	Tiberian Sun
Delta Force	Homeworld	Roller Coaster Tycoon	Tomb Raider 1-5
Desperados	I. Jones: Inf. Machine	S. Wars: Phant. Men.	Tony Hawk's 2
Destruction Derby 2	Ice Wind Dale	S. Wars: Rogue Squad.	Toy Story 2
Deus-Ex	Imperialism 2	Secret Monkey Island	Unreal Tournament
Diablo 1 & 2	Imp. Galactica 1 & 2	Secret Monk. Island 2	Urban chaos
Disc World 2	Int. Cricket Captain	Severance	Warcraft 2
Discworld Noir	Kingpin	Shogun: Total War	Worms Armageddon
Doom 2	Lego Racers	Sim City 3000	Worms World Party
Driver	London Racer	Sim City 2000	X-Files: The Game

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EXTENDED PLAY

Time for *PC ZONE* readers to get their jackboots on this month with the fabulous RTS *Sudden Strike*, enjoy some class-based carnage with our *Team Fortress* goodies, or get the brown stuff scared out of you playing *Aliens Vs Predator*

SAVING YOUR PRIVATES Tony Lamb

TRY IT YOURSELF

ON THE CD

Sudden Strike single-player maps unzip to the "Sudden Strike/Maps/single" folder and multiplayer maps into the "Sudden Strike/Maps/mplay" directory. All can be easily selected in-game. The version 1.2a patch should self-extract to the right directory (but watch it to make sure).

The *TFC* maps from the CD go into your "Half-Life/TFC/maps" directory while the others automatically install to your PC when you join the server running that map. The HPB Bot is a self-extractor that needs to be pointed at your *Half-Life* root directory (*not* into your *TFC* directory or it won't work!). Make sure you check out the ReadMe.txt file for configuration details. Once installed, you can run any map as a hosted LAN game and fight the bots.

AvP maps go into your "Fox/Aliens Versus Predator/avp_rifs/custom" directory but always read the .txt files as some graphics and sound files have to go into other directories instead.

TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC FOR HALF-LIFE

***TFC* is the *Half-Life* mod that spawned a wealth of copycats. It's the best class-based team shooter and while the *Quake III* variant might be more hardcore and *Unreal Fortress* better looking, none has yet toppled *Half-Life TFC* from its pedestal as the online class fragfest of choice. Your choice of class determines your strengths, weaknesses and special skills – you could be a sniper attempting to kill a civilian VIP, a heavy gunner defending a flag from capture or an engineer building a sentry gun – it's up to you.**

Most online servers use the original maps, but some are trying out new ones at last. We've got some on the CD and taken a look at a few others.

][Sniper

Author: Mulchman
Filename:][_Sniper.zip
Size: 215Kb
Rating:



][Sniper has a simple layout, but it really works!

A simple map with two bases facing each other across a poisonous canal. Each has two layered sets of battlements and an arc of windows to fire from. Plenty of dark corners make excellent hiding places, but the regularity of the architecture makes it all too easy to spot a careless sniper.

Mulch_Die 5v5

Author: Mulchman
Filename: mulch_die.zip
Size: 1.2Mb
Rating:



It doesn't get much more Goth than the bases in Mulch_Die.

A medium-sized CTF map and again, good fun. Mulch_Die leads to pretty intense action as everything is on a smaller scale than most other CTF layouts, but like the title says, it's much better with smaller teams. If the bases were further apart with something in between then this would be even better.

HPB Bot

Author: Botman
Filename: HPB_bot_1_4a.exe
Size: 280Kb
Rating:

If you want a bot that will happily kick your butt on standard *TFC* levels and often do well on the third-party maps, then this one is a star. Installation is simple and the bot is configurable from blindingly stupid to awesomely lethal. Check out the files for the full instructions, set up a LAN match against HPB Bots, and refine your game!

The maps below automatically download when you join a *Team Fortress Classic* server.

Murderball

Rating:



Middle of the match and no one's turned up? Must be a Brentford game.

No goals are needed here – just possession. Four teams and keeping the ball earns points. When you die you drop the ball.

SniperZone

Rating:



SniperZone has a variety of hiding places.

SniperZone does what it says on the tin, and better than most. Two bases separated by an electric fence, plenty of cover, dark corners and enough range to make the zoom worthwhile.

Goober

Rating:



Some more adventurous textures would be nice...

Basic CTF map with plenty of ammo in the bunkers near the middle. Very much a defenders' dream, so one for engineers and *Homeworld* guys only.

SniperCom

Rating:

SniperCom could be great but is always run with too many players. So many places to watch, and you can be sniped respawning. Nasty. Six players max or avoid it.

Turkeyburgers

Rating:



Turkeyburgers pits mouse-sized combatants against each other in a fight to the death.

Team deathmatch with mouse-sized combatants running around a giant office. It's quite effective and allows all classes to get stuck in. Give it a whirl.

MULCH TRENCH

MAP OF THE MONTH MULCH TRENCH

Filename: mulch_trench.zip
Size: 2.5Mb
Rating:
Author: Mulchman

This is classic Capture The Flag and great fun. The map is well thought out with nicely designed bases and lends itself to some fast fragging action. Snipers have good cover without being all-powerful, Soldiers can rocket jump across the open ground or inside the bases, sentry guns can be well positioned and the two entrances to each base make defence a gamble. New graphics and sounds add to the atmosphere. Great stuff.



Imposing bases, sniper points, defensive positions... Mulch Trench is the business.

SUDDEN STRIKE

***Sudden Strike* is the World War II equivalent of *Shogun: Total War* or *Cossacks* – a great RTS game that will enthral fans of that particular historical period. The difference is that instead of sake-crazed Japanese warriors slicing each other to ribbons or vodka-soused barbarians slaughtering each other on the Russian Steppes, here you fight with tanks, drop paratroopers down behind enemy lines and dodge enemy snipers as you progress through your missions. You don't have to worry about resource gathering before you get your units either, because in *SS* you don't need to do that (thank goodness). In this game you actually go out there and get stuck into some real action – even if you get a bloody nose for your efforts. Well, it never stopped the Germans…**

SINGLE-PLAYER US GAME MAPS

Author: CDV
Filename: AP_Usmaps.zip
Size: 323Kb total
The US version of *Sudden Strike* has five single-player maps that we didn't get to enjoy. Now, courtesy of CDV, we can…

Snipers

Author: CDV (part of Usmaps.zip)
Rating:



Drop paras behind enemy lines to open up a second front.

Every soldier hates snipers. In this heavily wooded 128x128 map, your Allied forces have to search out and eradicate a number of these hidden killers without falling victim themselves. Unfortunately for you, most of your troops are on foot and horribly vulnerable to bullets, so tread carefully and remember that there won't only be snipers hiding out there – the enemy has plenty of camouflaged bunkers too (and tanks, and soldiers…).

The Eagle Has Landed

Author: CDV (part of Usmaps.zip)
Rating:



You can't put a convoy across a bridge if the bridge isn't there.

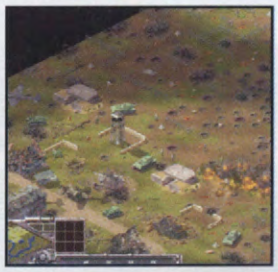
You've seen the film, now play the game. No, not really – this is about destroying an enemy convoy rather than parachuting German troops into a sleepy English village, but it's still good clean murderous fun. On this 128x128 map you control American forces and have to stop a German convoy that is crossing from East to West. Sadly for you, you don't have many soldiers to do it with, so careful use of your paratroopers and bombers is essential. Not easy.

Multiplayer: Finale

Author: CDV
Filename: Finale.zip
Size: 89Kb
Rating:
Coming from the fevered minds of *Sudden Strike* honchos CDV themselves, this is the multiplayer map that was used for the German *SS* Championship in Berlin. There are a few neat tricks in this map that add to the fun, and these include two train stations, balloon captures and two more camps – possession of any of which earns reinforcements. At 160x160 in size and with two to four players, this map guarantees you some action.

Special Action

Author: CDV (part of Usmaps.zip)
Rating:



Lots of tank traps and a well-dug-in enemy make Special Action a challenge.

For this map, your orders are simple enough – take the town! However, as always, what looks simple to the General isn't so easy for the soldier on the ground. This 128x128 map sees you in command of German troops faced with capturing the wreck of a Soviet village. It looks as if everything has already been obliterated from the air, but now you have to go in and mop up. The huge number of anti-tank defences make an approach difficult, and Soviet spoiling raids don't take long to become counter-attacks. It's up to you – full-on frontal assault or sneaky tactical encirclement?

The Mad Scientist

Author: CDV (part of Usmaps.zip)
Rating:



These railway sidings are a hotbed of hostile troops. Go there at your peril.

Another 128 x 128 map and your objective this time is to free a group of prisoners who are being held by the Germans. You command Allied forces in a winter environment and have to cross a rugged terrain with forests, frozen ground and several small lakes. To make your mission more difficult, you have no air support and will have to do the rescue unaided. Careful reconnaissance and clever tactics will be needed here or you'll lose badly. Beware the train yards at the bottom of the map – they're heavily guarded.



Use your air support wisely. These bunkers should have been hit before they could blow the bridge!

ENCLOSED

MAP OF THE MONTH ENCLOSED

Author: CDV (part of Usmaps.zip)
Rating:
In this 128 x 128 map, all you have to do is help your German troops survive until the reinforcements arrive. That might sound simple, but with your position in the centre of the town open to Soviet attack from all sides it won't be easy. Tactically, you're in a fix too; you have no long-range view, the town layout isn't easily defended, and although you have plenty of troops and armour, they start the map horribly spread out and disorganised. Get this wrong and the reds will have your head on a plate.



Dropping paratroopers into enemy armoured columns is generally seen as a bad idea…

Multiplayer: Bravo-Rexx (2 to 4 players)

Author: Braveheart Mods
Filename: Bravo-Rexx-2-2.zip
Size: 200Kb
Rating:
A two to four player map that squeezes the most action into its 256 x 256 maximum size. There's plenty of tactical thinking needed here as you have to fight your way into the town, get across a river without any of your troops being cut off or forced to a halt, capture an airport, fight on rugged terrain and more. And all before breakfast too…

Multiplayer: Bravo-Rexx (4-4) V13

Author: Braveheart Mods
Filename: Bravo-Rexx (4-4)V13.zip
Size: 200Kb
Rating:
The same map as Bravo-Rexx (2-2) but here in a four-vs-four or three-vs-three variant. It's still a great map for a fight, but with this many players things begin to get a bit crowded.

Multiplayer: Bravo-Rexx (6-6) V13

Author: Braveheart Mods
Filename: Bravo-Rexx (6-6) V13.zip
Size: 200Kb
Rating:



Again the Bravo-Rexx 2-4 map, but now shoehorning in as many as 12 players. This will get busy.

Again the Bravo-Rexx (2-2) map, but this time steroid-enhanced up to a whopping five-vs-five or even six-vs-six team size. The fighting comes fast and furious as the teams now find it hard to avoid each other, but if carnage is what you want then this will suit you.

Sudden Strike v1.2 Patch

Author: CDV
Filename: suddenstrike_v1_2a_patch_e.zip
Size: 2.1Mb
Rating:
Bringing *Sudden Strike* up to version 1.2, the tweaks include enhanced GameSpy support and the opportunity to again enjoy the third-party mods available (rectifying some incompatibility issues with earlier SS patches).

ALIENS VS PREDATOR

Take a surreal, terrifying environment. Add smoke, haze, flickering light and the worst monsters to have graced our cinema screens in the last 20 years, stand back, and wait for the mayhem to begin. When Rebellion put ingredients like these together to create *AvP* they might not have made the best first-person shooter ever, but they certainly made the most frightening. No other FPS has even come close in terms of sheer nail-biting atmosphere, and with *AvP2* moving ever closer, it looks as if we'll see new heights of terror on our PC screens.

USS_Clipper (map)

Author: Scythe Wraith
Filename: USS_Clipper.zip
Size: 510Kb
Rating: ★★★☆☆

Clipper is an *AvP* map of the old school with dark, enclosed corridors, plenty of ammo and lots of aliens who want to get to know you better. Ostensibly on board the USS Clipper, the map is simple in design with little in the way of open space and no use of stairs or moving doorways. A couple of inaccurately laid out tiles are an annoyance but luckily they don't get in the way.

The Forest (map)

Author: Scythe Wraith
Filename: forestmap.zip
Size: 761Kb
Rating: ★★☆☆☆



Simple textures and sharp angles reveal the weaknesses in the *AvP* engine.

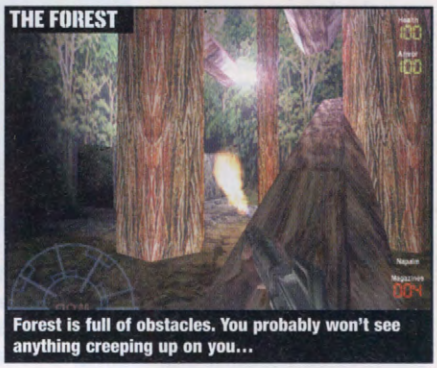
The Forest is a multiplayer-only map and is a maze of small, leafy tunnels connecting a network of rooms that aren't much bigger than the tunnels themselves. Unfortunately this isn't the ideal scenario for the *AvP* engine to draw, and with the simple foliage textures it isn't very convincing. The characteristic *AvP* atmosphere makes it OK for blastabout practice, though. PCZ



They were dancing nicely until somebody ruined it all by using the gun...



USS Clipper is a simple map but a definite challenge.



Forest is full of obstacles. You probably won't see anything creeping up on you...

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Maps for *TFC* and *Half-Life* are here. Some great stuff.

www.tfc.pcgame.com
A huge website for downloads, maps, hints and everything you could ever want to know about *TFC*. Add it to the bookmark list now!

NET ADDRESSES SUDDEN STRIKE

www.camel-box.de/sudden/indexeng.htm
The English-language part of Camel-box and a top resource for *SS* maps, mods, news and lots of other goodies. An essential bookmark.

www.suddenstrike.co.uk
The German championship map is above, but this is the site to find out all about the UK *Sudden Strike* Championship. It's a big event so check out this website.

www.suddenstrikeonline.de/esuststart.html
Another great resource for single and multiplayer maps, news and more.

www.suddenstrike.dk
News, articles, downloads, links and lots of other stuff too.

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www.foxinteractive.com/games/avpg
Fox are the publishers of *AvP* so check this site out for some top class goodies!

GROTTO PART1

MAP OF THE MONTH GROTTO PART 1

Filename: grottoopt1map.zip
Size: 1.7Mb
Rating: ★★★☆☆
Author: Scythe Wraith

Grotto is proof that the *AvP* engine is capable of recreating more than just corridors and air ducts! This map is all outdoors and makes a change from the normal *AvP* environment. This is very unusual – we just don't see outdoor maps for *AvP* – and pretty exciting, although the map is let down by some graphical glitches including pixel-thin walls and textures that don't quite match up. That said though, the map comes alive in multiplayer mode and is one of very few *AvP* maps where a team could actually stage any sort of tactical attack over a large area. In the valley you'll find a Marine dropship, a predator ship and several buildings to fight over. Get this one on a LAN and it's tops, but it's still fun in skirmish mode.



Spend too long in the open, and you'll soon have company.

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COMMENT



PC gaming is splitting into more factions than they have in the Middle East. Luckily they're all too insular to be fighting each other

NEUTRAL OBSERVER Paul Presley

OK, this one's about communities. You're not a trainspotter (or 'train fan' as they now prefer to be called), neither do you know anyone that is. At least that's your story. But I'll guarantee you one thing, *Microsoft Train Simulator* is going to enter the charts in the top five the first week of its release and it's going to stay there for a long, long time. Yet you'll never find anyone who'll admit to having bought a copy.

Because you're not a part of that community. Just as you're not a part of the Flight Simulator community, *The Sims* community or the *EverQuest* community. At least not publicly. You'll happily admit to being part of *the Counter-Strike* or *Quake III* communities because they're all about cool manly things such as killing and guns and stuff. But put a pointy-eared elf or a Cessna light aircraft in the frame and watch the coughs, the muttered excuses about places to be, things to do, and the embarrassed half-glances.

The problem is that the nerdish reputation surrounding these types of games runs a contradictory parallel to the fact they garner huge followings. Look at all the scenery packs and plane models you can download *for Microsoft Flight Sim*, or the wallpapers, flooring tiles and furniture you can get for *The Sims*. Somebody, somewhere is playing these games, but will anyone own up? Of course not.

And that is what's going to happen *to Microsoft Train Simulator*. The community is already growing and the included editing tools ensure the game's shelf life has the potential to last just as long as its aviation-related brother. But the very nature of the subject matter is going to drive it underground, almost from the moment it's released. Which is annoying as hell from a gaming standpoint, as it's actually damn good. I've never had any particular affinity towards the world of chuffers before, but I must admit that the sheer quality of the simulation on offer here really took a hold of me. So why should I feel ashamed to say so?

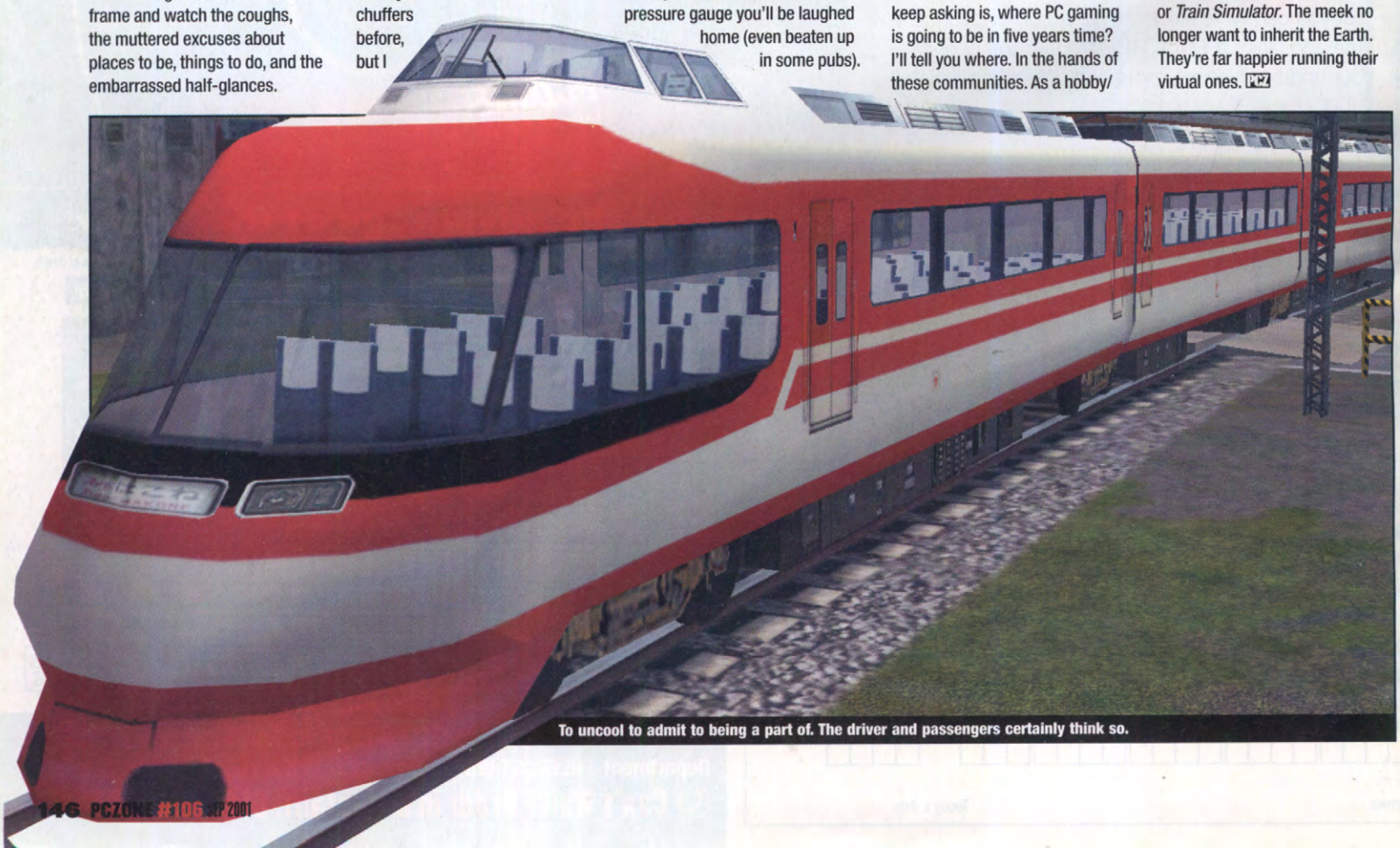
Luckily, I get paid for this, so there's a built-in excuse from the get-go (plus I was asked my opinion of the game while the rest of the *ZONE* crew were busying themselves with a rare game of *Risk II*, so the anorak quotient in the room was already high enough to spare my blushes). What if I'm down the pub though? We've all got our obsessions, Steve Hill could bore for England on *Champ Manager*, Mark Hill is an expert on horror-related gaming, but these genres are considered 'cool'. It's OK to talk about the merits of the long-ball approach, but if you mention a steam pressure gauge you'll be laughed home (even beaten up in some pubs).

So what is this? An impassioned plea on behalf of the little guy? Defence of the nerd? Sort of. Current attitudes aren't about to change. The gun will always hold sway over the notebook. The pen is really only mightier than the sword when it's signing an execution warrant. All I'm saying is be aware that multiplayer gaming means more than just shooting your mate over a LAN in *Counter-Strike*. There's just as much gaming going on in the message boards of specialist websites as anywhere else, be it swapping scenery files and airline liveries, creating unofficial patches for games abandoned by publishers, or organising petitions against a game's cancellation.

"The level of passion and commitment is far stronger in the 'geekier' genres than in any of the first-person-shooter arenas"

One of the questions people keep asking is, where PC gaming is going to be in five years time? I'll tell you where. In the hands of these communities. As a hobby/industry/medium (call it what you will), PC gaming will never be mainstream in the same way as film, because rather than unifying into a single acceptable, identifiable entity, it's fragmenting. I'm lucky enough to be in a position that allows me to sample all the meats from our gaming stew, and believe me when I say the level of passion and commitment to their chosen field is far stronger in the 'geekier' genres than in any of the first-person-shooter arenas. When did you last see a *Quake* fan protesting against a major US rail firm for not allowing its trains to be included in a simulation?

But this is more an exercise in awareness. In four or five months, take a look back over the charts and see which groups are dominant in the world of PC gaming. Sure, *Champ Man* will always be there, but look how many of the top slots are filled with *The Sims*, civilian flight sims or *Train Simulator*. The meek no longer want to inherit the Earth. They're far happier running their virtual ones. PZ



To uncool to admit to being a part of. The driver and passengers certainly think so.

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